



“Upon a Time Tales

*A Bouquet of Stories
to Uplift the Spirit
and Delight the Heart*

*written down by
dan menkin*

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by dan menkin

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Introduction

In 1988 my mother bought me my first computer. Finally, having a word processor, the inner writer was released, and it's been flying ever since. At the time I was a massage practitioner, integrating transformation-oriented bodywork with inner peace counseling. Since this was an uncommon offering, it was natural for me to write about my work, and gradually it was published locally, then nationally.

In 1994 I began a five year series of bi-monthly columns for *Massage Magazine* about this work, and in 1996, the first three year's writing was "massaged" into a book and published as *Transformation Through Bodywork*, staying in print until 2017. When the publisher finally pulled the title and returned the copyright to me, I was able to realize a longtime dream of donating the e-book to several online libraries so that anyone anywhere in the world could find it and benefit from what it offered without cost.

After that book had been published, I continued writing for *Massage Magazine* and ended up having 13 additional columns which I assembled into a booklet and printed a few copies for anyone who wanted it. Recently, after posting the e-book, it seemed natural to re-format that additional offering and self-publish it online also, to be shared along with the first.

In addition to professional writing, I was also inspired

to write down several short stories that presented themselves during meditation. Some were intended as children's tales, some were a kind of poetry, and many were spiritual allegories. The rest were the result of a lovely win-win situation that developed with the publisher of *The Singles Almanac*, a Boston-area dating-ad magazine. In return for stories with a romantic bent (which gave her give-away a semblance of editorial content), she gave me a quarter-page ad for my massage business. So with a guaranteed readership, I began to regularly produce short stories, which I assembled into a little self-printed volume in the 1990s to share with a few friends. Now, having put my two other books online, I wanted to also offer these *Upon A Time Tales*.

Each story is like one of my *children*, and as parents well know, while their children come *through* them, each is its own unique self, with its own special way of being and gifts to give. Alas, these literary *children* have been hanging around my house for too many decades now, and it is time for them to find their own way in the world. So if any are particularly dear to you, please do "adopt" them and feel free to copy and share in whatever manner you wish: attach to e-mails, post on web-sites and social media pages, print-out and place wherever you think others will enjoy, and publish links to the online book.

While each of these stories was originally copyrighted in my name, they are now all offered into the Creative Commons and declared to be public domain.

Before each story, there is a short introduction. They are presented with my favorites first, then the relationship-themed ones in the middle, and others at the end. Many are futuristic – as you read these, please remember that when they were written, people didn't have cell phones (what to say of smart-phones), and the internet and social media were still the stuff of science fiction.

I am currently retired and living in semi-seclusion, practicing meditation and yoga. In these later years of my life, I want to freely pass on what was freely given to me. I do hope this offering inspires and delights.

In ongoing appreciation of the creative talent dormant in each of us, just waiting to be recognized and expressed,

dan menkin
May, 2018

(In 1997 I wrote an article for adults who were dealing with their inner child about using stories to heal. The following unfolded itself within that writing, and I later excerpted and edited it into a children's tale. In 2014 it was published in the British magazine, Juno, A Natural Approach to Family Life. While it can be read as a simple story about courage and devotion, it can also be understood as the soul's journey to reclaim its lost treasure and return Joy to one's inner "kingdom.")

Mattie and the Dragon

Long ago, in a distant, land there was an impoverished kingdom ruled by a kind but not very powerful king. Many generations ago the treasure of the land had been stolen by a fierce dragon, and ever since the people had eked out a meager living as best they could. But the sparkle had disappeared from their eyes, the birds' song had lost its sweetness, and the sun no longer had the power to warm their weary bones.

Now the king of this land had but one daughter, the princess Matilda. Mattie, as she preferred to be called, was fair, but more important, her heart was true, and she grieved sorely for the suffering of the people. Many a fine knight had come to seek her hand in marriage, but always the requirement was the same: find and slay the dragon, and return the kingdom's treasure. All had set out valiantly with songs of victory upon their lips, but none returned.

As the years passed by, Mattie began to suspect that none of these fine knights would succeed. Slowly she came to realize that if the treasure were to be found and returned, *she* would have to be the one to do it. Quietly she began to train herself as an explorer, and she spent long hours studying with anyone who was willing to share their skills with her.

At last the day arrived when she knew she must depart. With some trepidation, she went to her father and told him of her plan. His face paled, for his love for her was

great, and he feared much for her safety. But realizing that her heart was set, he finally gave his blessing and supplied her with a fine horse and supplies for her journey.

Mattie had heard that the dragon resided in the high mountains to the West, but there were mighty rivers, prairies, and even deserts to cross before she could reach them. One night in a fierce storm, her horse ran off, taking most of her supplies with him. Distraught as she was with this setback, Mattie knew she must go on. So she continued on foot toward the high mountains, learning to take gratefully whatever sustenance came her way, and continually reminding herself why she had set out on this quest.

At last the mountains were in view, and soon she found herself climbing a steep trail. While it had no markings, her instinct had grown strong over the past months, and she sensed the dragon's lair was near. Tired though she was from her long journey, as she gained altitude, a special kind of light began to shine more brightly inside, bringing her great peace. One morning as she awoke, she noticed a thin curl of smoke from beyond the next rise. Packing her things, she eagerly continued along the trail, sensing that at last she was nearly upon the object of her quest. Just before noon she rounded a bend and froze, for there before her was the biggest, most ferocious, most evil-smelling thing she had ever seen. It snorted fire and billowed smoke, but behind this monster she could clearly see the glittering of her kingdom's treasure – and the burned bones of many a knight who had tried to reclaim it.

Reaching for the sword at her side, she was struck with how ridiculous this weapon was for fighting the dragon before her. Maybe it was her fear, or maybe it was her weariness from the journey, but for whatever reason, a grin slowly crept across her face. She dropped her sword and found herself beginning to giggle. As the dragon snorted more fire, the giggles turned to laughter. As the dragon's

roar became louder, her laughter too began to shake the ground. Even though she suspected she was going to be fried in the next moment, she couldn't help herself. It was so ludicrous, all those fine young men coming here to meet their death with nothing more than a tiny shaft of steel to protect them. The more she thought about it, the harder she laughed, until gradually the tears of laughter became tears of mourning for these brave, if somewhat foolish, young men who had tried to help her kingdom and win her hand.

It took some time before Mattie returned to an awareness of what was around her. When she did, though, she noticed the dragon had stopped billowing fire and was gazing at her thoughtfully. Returning the gaze, she began to feel that there was more before her than met the eye. Looking once more at the pile of charred bones, her heart cried out, *Why? Why did you have to kill them?* To her utter amazement, Mattie heard the answer ring out clearly within her mind: *Because they tried to kill me.*

“What did you say?” asked Mattie out loud, thinking that talking with a dragon didn’t make a whole lot of sense. *But of course it does,* replied the dragon in her mind, *especially if you are really serious about having your kingdom’s treasure returned.* Mattie’s jaw dropped open and, staring wide-eyed at the dragon, she heard clear as day, *Oh yes, I can talk. If any of those men had stopped to listen, they too would have heard me tell them how to reclaim the treasure. But they were so bent on killing me that listening never even occurred to them.*

Regaining her composure, Mattie stood up, introduced herself, and asked the dragon’s name. *I have many names, Mattie,* replied the dragon, *but you may call me Counselor.*

“That’s a good name,” said Mattie, “because I could really use some counsel about now.” So she told the dragon of her life in the impoverished kingdom, of all the men who offered to help but couldn’t, of her quest, and of her new

awareness that trying to kill the dragon would not help regain her kingdom's treasure.

You are wise, Mattie, and your heart is indeed true, replied the dragon. *Perhaps you will discover that these qualities serve your purpose better than the ability to kill me.*

Even though the dragon before her continued to appear as a fearful beast, Mattie sensed warmth and compassion as the dragon spoke with her. *Do not be misled by outer appearances,* said the dragon. *Stay focused on what is most important to you, and see what you can see.*

For the rest of the afternoon Mattie and Counselor spoke of many things. Gradually Mattie found the courage to come closer, and the dragon allowed her to explore the cave where the treasure was kept. It was vast beyond measure, and Mattie had to laugh as she considered the impossibility of a single knight getting much of it back to the kingdom even if he *had* vanquished the dragon.

But Mattie was no longer thinking in terms of conquering this noble being. She had learned much that afternoon, and she sensed that Counselor was willing to be her friend. That night Counselor shared delicious food with Mattie and showed her a soft place to sleep curled up on its warm body. No longer did Mattie find the dragon's smell unpleasant, for just as her eyes had learned to see beyond the fearsome outer skin, so too had friendship shown her other senses deeper inner truths.

In the morning, Mattie and Counselor conferred once more. Stay here with me, suggested Counselor, and I will teach you dragon lore and help you continue to unfold your wisdom.

“Oh Counselor, I would love to,” replied Mattie, “but my kingdom suffers and, having found their stolen treasure, ... “

Be careful, dear Mattie, and do not assume too much, interrupted Counselor. *It is true that many years ago I came and took this treasure from your kingdom. But what you*

don't know is that it was a time of great stupidity, and the treasure was being squandered. The Queen then was a good woman, but ill and dying, and she feared for her people. So she sent for me and asked that I take what was left of their wealth and guard it until such a time as one of her offspring would be wise enough and brave enough to find me and ask for it back. It appears that today is that day.

With tears of appreciation, Mattie hugged Counselor and asked, “Will you come back with me, then, and teach us how to use this treasure more wisely than our ancestors did?”

Counselor agreed, and over the coming weeks, Mattie and Counselor flew many times from the lair to the kingdom, distributing treasure and teaching the people to honor their returning wealth. The old king was so grateful to them that he made Mattie queen of the land, and her first official act was to humbly request her dearest friend to stay with them and truly be their Counselor.

(In the mid 1980s I participated in a men's Vision Quest, and from this evolved a men's group that met periodically in the forest and continued to develop our courage in devotion to Mother Earth. The recollections of the invented character, Grandpa Dave, actually happened; just the beginning and end are fiction.)

How I Saved the Earth

Grandpa Dave is rocking peacefully on the porch swing, watching the children playing in front of the house. The calendar on the kitchen wall claims it is May 23, 2007, but in the mind of Grandpa Dave, the years are a bit less sure of themselves. Soaring up and down through the second half of the twentieth century, Dave's mind, like a curious butterfly, settles upon a particularly sweet memory and looks inside to see if there isn't still some nectar to be enjoyed there.

But Grandpa Dave is not destined to savor this memory alone. Into his secluded world bursts his grandson Chris with his ten-year-old explosive energy ready to obliterate the delicate winged-one poised on the threshold of recollection.

“Grandpa! Grandpa!” Eighty-seven pounds of agonizing boyhood plops itself on the cushion beside him. Into his eyes stares a lad resembling a precarious dam about to burst with emotion. Instinctively Grandpa Dave reaches out and draws the boy to him, carefully respecting the opposing pulls of child-seeking-comfort and almost-adolescent-trying-to-seem-tough.

After a few moments of just sitting quietly together, gently rocking and feeling nourishment in each other's touch, Chris begins to speak, awkwardly trying to avoid sentences which would release embarrassing tears. It turns

out that the neighborhood bullies have been teasing him again, playing their games of brute force and taunting him to compete where he has no chance of success. The almost-adolescent in him terribly resents his powerlessness, but what to do?

Grandpa Dave, though, seems completely unperturbed, yet in some wonderful way, really with him in his quandary. Quietly they sit there, old man and youth, rocking and breathing to the eternal rhythms which, Chris somehow senses, Grandpa Dave can really hear, though his ear for the human voice seems to be fading a bit. Feeling secure next to this living statement of peace, Chris is content to just sit for awhile and wonder if Grandpa Dave is going to tell him one of his famous stories.

Chris is not to be disappointed. The butterfly which had disappeared from Grandpa Dave's consciousness upon Chris' arrival has now revealed to him just the right memory for this occasion, and all that remains is to dress it up with the fineries which turn a simple recollection into a wonderful tale of adventure.

Pacing his words to the hypnotic rocking of the swing, Grandpa Dave looks Chris straight in the eye and says, "Yep, that's a pisser alright! Wish I could help you, son, but . . . Hummm, . . . well, this does sort of remind me of a pretty tough situation I had to figure my way out of a few years back." Grandpa Dave raises his eyebrows suggestively, letting Chris know it was more likely a few decades back, probably way before he was even born! But the confusion in time just adds to the mystery.

"Well now, as I recall, it was back in the mid-80's, and a bunch of us men had been meetin' for several years out in the back woods of upstate New York. We periodically got together to support each other in our growth as spiritual

warriors – whatever that meant – and also as men and as Earth Servants. Even back then we understood that much of our male-culture was destructive, and we were trying to learn new ways to express our life's energy that would contribute something useful to our Planet – maybe even help save it from the doom that seemed to be lurking just around the corner.

“One crisp autumn day, several of us participated in an inventive and amazingly powerful game. Its purpose was to help each of the guys there rise above his limited beliefs and habits and discover new ways to assert his higher self. Our guide explained the ancient tradition of ‘running-the-gauntlet’ – you know, where a bunch of men form a tunnel of abuse, and the initiate had to make his way through it while being hit (or worse!) by everyone.

“Today, though, we were going to try a new variation as a way of strengthening our commitments as Earth Stewards. We were each to take a turn firmly holding an ‘Earth Ball’ – a soft, stuffed pillow looking like our planet and meant to represent our commitment to serving the Earth. Holding this tender ‘Earth’ in our arms, we had to make our way through an imposing corridor of brothers who mostly were trying to keep us from moving forward. While the actual distance to be traveled was only about 15 feet, we were each confronted with a mass of sixteen tough men physically blocking our way. And even worse, taunting words were thrown at us from all sides to demoralize us.

“Now this may sound strange, Chris, but along with all this abuse, every once in a while someone would put out some loving, supportive encouragement! The idea was to make this trial feel sort of like the way life usually feels – sometimes supportive, sometimes seeming to block your way.

“So, somehow or another each of us had to find our own unique way of running-the-gauntlet. Those who attempted to use brute force soon found out that they were no match for sixteen strong men determined to block them. In addition, when we utilized our tried-and-true tricks of ‘being nice’ or some other form of subtle manipulation, the others would ruthlessly taunt us with the impotence of these methods. And despair was useless too, for not to succeed was to be condemned to endless taunts, separation from the brotherhood, and worse, failure in our mission to carry the Planet to safety.

“I was the last person in my group to run-the-gauntlet, and I had ample time to observe each of my potential strategies be tried by someone else. Each met with utter failure. I could feel panic welling up inside – there was no way I could complete this ritual! Yet not to do so was unthinkable.

“As my turn grew closer, a vision began to form deep within, a light which, if followed, offered the possibility of leading me through this seemingly impossible task. Its instructions were terrifyingly simple: go naked and focus only on your goal. Naked of strategy, naked of manipulation, and, oh yes – not a stitch of clothing! I tried to bargain with this inner-vision for a while, but as the second-to-last person was in mid-gauntlet, I surrendered. From that moment on, each movement occurred perfectly, and when heads all turned to the beginning of the line once more, there stood one clothed only in his pure intention, one armed only with his vision.

“I can’t tell you what happened during the next few minutes, Chris, for in some way ‘I’ wasn’t there. I still have vague memories of bodies blocking my way, of crude taunts aimed at undoing me. But ‘I’ wasn’t there to receive them.

There was ‘nobody home’ – just a willing Earth-servant focused 100% on bringing the Planet through to safety. Later, bruises and reports from my warrior-brothers proved that I did indeed have to struggle to move through. But my only experience – all I can remember – was following my inner vision and knowing with full certainty that the mission would be successful.

“As I completed the gauntlet and passed on my stewardship of the sacred Earth Ball, I was bathed in an awesome sense of the power and peace that naturally flowed from surrendering my will and following the directions of my inner Guide.”

Grandpa Dave pauses for awhile and looks over to see how Chris is taking all this. Deep in thought, it takes Chris a few moments to realize that Grandpa Dave has stopped talking and is waiting for him to say something. But before he can open his mouth, Grandpa Dave is looking at him sternly and mockingly saying, “Now mind you, Chris, I don’t want to hear of you strippin’ naked here on the block and trying that with these ruffians. That was a unique situation, and my inner vision gave me a unique answer to my problem then.”

Chris’ face shows that he understands. “Yeah, I see what you mean. So you’re telling me that if I’ve got a problem I just can’t seem to figure out, then maybe I could see if I’ve got this inner vision thing inside and try doing what it shows me to do, right?”

Grandpa Dave nods rhythmically, gradually coming in tune with the motion of the swing. “Yep,” he finally says, “I’m sure you’ve got it. After all, you’re my grandson, ain’t ya? The trick, though, is to really want to serve some noble cause real bad. Then, somehow, what to do just reveals itself inside your head. ’Course sometimes folks don’t like what

they see, but then again, if you're sincere, you generally get a good dose of courage along with the vision."

Comforted and renewed, Chris springs off the swing, nearly toppling Grandpa Dave onto the porch. Catching himself just in time, he hears Chris' disappearing figure shout, "Thanks, Grandpa. You're the greatest!"

Well now, muses Grandpa Dave to himself, that's real sweet. But he knows that the real praise belongs to his lifelong Friend, the Spirit within which recently has begun appearing with incredibly gorgeous multi-colored wings and delights him with awe and wonder as It flutters through the flowers of his mind.

(This story is a spiritual allegory offered as inspiration to seekers to deepen their inner quest and continue all the way to immersion in the Eternal Light.)

The Cave of the Eternal Light

Once upon a time, in a far away land, there lived a wood-gatherer and his family. These people were very poor, and they had to labor from sun-up till sundown to barely survive. They were simple folks, though, and they accepted their lot with tranquility and thankfulness.

One day, as the wood-gatherer was walking through the forest, he came across a shining Holy Man meditating in a clearing. Never in his life had he seen a being who radiated such splendor! In awe, he waited and watched.

After a time, the Holy Man opened His eyes and noticed the wood-gatherer. Gradually the sweetest, most compassionate smile filled his face, and He beckoned the wood-gatherer to come and sit beside Him.

An hour passed in an instant, and eventually the wood-gatherer remembered that if he did not get on with his duties, his family would not be fed that evening.

Understanding, the Holy Man nodded and smiled. “My friend,” He said, “do you see the path that leads into the forest from that outcropping? Today, if you wish to receive a most special blessing, follow that path and you will come to the entrance of a cave. Using this candle, follow the path into the cave as far as you can. If you do this, I believe your heart’s greatest longing will be fulfilled.”

Bowing in deepest thankfulness, the wood-gatherer accepted the Holy Man’s candle and took his leave. He

located the beginning of the path quite easily, and with a light heart, began to walk where it led.

After several miles and some rather difficult climbing, he came to an opening in the mountain which indeed was the entrance to a very dark cave. Holding the Holy Man's candle before him, he entered. Though the intense darkness aroused feelings of fear, the light from his candle kept his mind focused upon his purpose: he wanted to find great wealth and deliver his family from the pain of poverty.

As the path descended deeper and deeper into the cave, the wood-gatherer began to notice large chunks of coal that had fallen from the walls. Knowing the great value of coal in the town marketplace, he filled his sack and began his retreat, thanking the Holy Man with each breath for this wondrous treasure.

That night, having sold his coal for more money than his family usually earned in a week, they had a wonderful celebration and sang joyous songs of praise to He who had led them to this great treasure. And that evening, for the first time in recent memory, all slept untroubled by pangs of hunger.

The next morning, still in a holiday mood, the entire family slept late and spent the morning enjoying their new feelings of wealth. With no need to work that day, they cleaned their hut and did many of the nice little things for each other which had not been possible in their toil-filled days.

After a few days like this, the wood-gatherer arose early one morning and set off once more to find the cave the Holy Man had shown him. He missed the turns several times, but after much backtracking, he did manage to come to the entrance.

Using the candle the Holy Man had given him, he entered the cave and began the descent into its engulfing darkness. Once more he came upon the valuable chunks of coal, once more he filled his sack to overflowing, and once more he sold his treasure for enough money to support his family for a week.

So it went for many years. He still thought of himself as “The Wood-gatherer,” though no twigs had filled his sack for a very long time. But he had thought of himself in that way for so long that the old identity persisted. However, with the free time that this new wealth had brought them, he and his family were able to do many things that a mere wood-gatherer family might never dream of. And because they were basically kind and humble people, much of their time was spent in helping others, in providing free coal for those too poor or weak to gather their own fuel, and in offering joyous songs of praise to the Holy Man whose great gift was clearly the source of their new lives.

One day, as the wood-gatherer was filling his sack with the bounty of the cave, it occurred to him that he had never explored any further than this area where the black gold lay freely upon the ground. He felt in no hurry that day, and a great longing came upon him to explore this wondrous cave more deeply. With the Holy Man’s candle firmly in his outstretched hand, he began to slowly walk forward. For several hours he viewed in awe chambers which sparkled with diamonds embedded in the rock. He passed deep pools of crystal water, and as he drank, he felt his entire being become filled with its exquisite clarity and liquid wisdom.

Still deeper he journeyed until finally he came upon a chamber more expansive and wondrous than any he had seen before. And there, in the very center, upon a golden stand, was a giant sphere of crystal which shone with the

very Light of creation Itself. Bowing, he somehow knew to seat himself before this radiant globe and allow its heavenly Light to bathe him to his very core.

Perhaps we might call what followed meditation, but the wood-gatherer was much too ignorant to know of such fancy words. In the simplicity of his pure heart, though, he knew to worship, to surrender, and to receive the blessings which radiated from the center of the cave which the Holy Man had shown him.

In this surrendering, he found his consciousness drawn into the very center of the sphere. From this vantage point, he could look outward and follow each ray of Light to its ultimate destination. For hours he gazed in wonder as he saw the entire world unfolding before his glance. As soon as he had a thought of an object anywhere, he was able to see that its ultimate source began with the light which shone from this wondrous crystal sphere. It was so obvious! Nothing was really as solid as it appeared – all was Light, was dancing images which had their source in this crystal sphere at the heart of the Holy Man's cave.

After a time, the strain of such expanded awareness finally overcame the wood-gatherer. He sadly found his consciousness leaving the crystal sphere and returning to his now apparently-solid body. Overcome with exhaustion, he slept. After a time he awoke and was delighted to see that the Holy Man's candle was still shining, though the length of the taper had diminished noticeably. Slowly he found his way out of the cave and returned to his family.

Days passed, and something was obviously very different. His wife and children noticed it, but when asked, the wood-gatherer became oddly silent and retreated to a grassy glen near the hut. Within, he felt haunted by what seemed a dream – he could barely dare to think it an actual

memory! Yet he could not forget. And in remembering, all of his normal world seemed pale and without much meaning. He longed with all his heart to return to the magical chamber he thought he remembered, but there was a fear upon him, and he hesitated. Every now and then he would look at the stub of a candle which remained from what the Holy Man had given him, and he wondered if it would last for the duration of another trip into the cave.

After what seemed to him like an eternity of indecision, he awoke one morning with a glad heart and a clear purpose. He would return, and all fears of the consequences of this decision he boldly banished from his mind. Ascending the mountain once more, he was almost giddy with anticipation. The images of the chamber with its radiant crystal sphere now danced in his mind constantly, fed by a new daring which he could only assume was still another marvelous gift from his beloved Holy Man friend.

At last he came to the entrance of the cave and traversed the miles of twisting corridors which led eventually to the remembered chamber. Yes! It had not been a dream – the dazzling crystal globe was before him once more, and without hesitation he took his place before it. He sat erect and with joyful respect offered all that he was to the Eternal Light which danced before him.

Once more he found his consciousness being drawn into the very center of this laughing Light; once more he found himself gazing in awestruck wonder at the magnificence of creation which emanated from this very point. And this time he found himself filled with an overwhelming longing to merge with this Source of all creation, this Eternal Light from which all other lights derived their existence and meaning.

In his ecstatic explorations of the universe, the wood-

gatherer's gaze finally fell upon the place where his own body sat entranced. In his folded hands was a tiny stub of a candle, its wax almost completely consumed. He watched as the last molecules rose up the wick, as the last feeble rays of light sputtered from the dying flame. He was aware that if the flame should cease to burn, the wood-gatherer would never be able to leave the cave. He also knew that it didn't matter, for that which had been living within the wood-gatherer was immortal, was One with the Source of all Light, of all creation, and was able to dance freely in any form, in any place, in any time.

Still, due to a certain fondness for that which he had been, his heart trembled slightly as he watched the last flicker of his old fear rise up the wick and be consumed in the moment the flame burned its last.

Where before had been sitting a humble wood-gatherer, there now appeared the radiant form of the Holy Man. His face aglow with a beauty never seen by mortal eyes, He began to expand and draw the shinning crystal within him As He grew, the entire cavern easily fit within His joyous heart. Still larger He became, now encompassing the entire cave, the mountain, the planet, and, finally, all of creation!

From within the shinning sphere in the Holy Man's heart, it was so very obvious that this magnificent Being and all creation were indeed one and the same. There was no separation anywhere, just infinite Joy, Truth, Freedom, Love, and Peace. There had never been anywhere to go, never been anything to accomplish, never been any need to fulfill. It had always been perfect, always would be perfect, and indeed, could not possibly be any other way.

With a radiant compassion which danced upon and within every molecule of creation, the Holy Man smiled.

In a humble hut near a grassy glen, a wood-gatherer returned with his sack of coal. A wife and children were fed and played happily with their father. Joyous laughter continued to fill this part of the forest. And life went on, bathed in the ever-present glow of the Eternal Light.

(This 1980s story is a spiritual allegory based on the Indian idea of Maya, which says that the world we perceive is not as it appears, but a superimposition from our own mind. Though this ancient wisdom-teaching may seem at odds with our current “scientific” culture, consider the advent of virtual reality technology and the ability of our computers to transform mental images into shareable experiences. It may not be too many more years now before the fantasy of this story becomes a common reality.)

Sarah’s Dad

Sarah’s dad has a most amazing job. He is Chief Projectionist at *The Theater of Life*. Sarah loves to come to the theater with him and watch him work.

Today Sarah is turning nine. As a special treat, Sarah’s dad is taking her to the theater before it opens to teach her how to operate the projection equipment herself.

Sarah is in Heaven!

They arise very early this day, before the city around them has come to life, and quietly enter the still theater. Softly they climb the stairs to the top-most landing and enter the projection booth. Even though Sarah has been here many times before, today everything seems new and exciting with the promise of her impending initiation.

As any child might be, she is thrilled and most eager to begin. Dancing with her excitement, though, is a solemn awe and natural reverence for what is about to take place.

Now, *The Theater of Life* is no ordinary movie palace. In common theaters, finished movies are sent “in the can” and simply run through a projector mechanically. But not so here. The *Theater of Life* offers only “live” cinema. How is this possible, you may wonder? To find out, let’s listen in as Sarah’s dad instructs her on this special day:

“Darling,” he begins after making them both a hot cup of cocoa, “before we begin, tell me what you remember about why this work is so special. Why do I come here day after day and make these live movies?”

“Oh Daddy, that’s easy! You love all the people who come here, and you make movies to help them learn. You show them the mysteries inside themselves and help them become big and strong. Just like with me,” she grins.

“Honey,” he winks, “you are one smart cookie! Now let’s look at all these machines and see how they work together.” Lifting her up in his strong, gentle arms, he places her in the projectionist’s chair, a sturdy contoured couch actually upon which the projectionist does his work.

Many times Sarah has watched as her dad reclines, places the mind-matching helmet upon his head, and begins the sacred process of creating movies. Today, however, Sarah will be making the movies, and her dad has created a special child-sized helmet just for her.

Sarah is attentive as her dad walks over to the far wall filled with lights and switches of all kinds. “you already know how you can make pictures and sounds and feelings inside your head, and how real these inner creations can be. When you put this mind-matching helmet on, relax, and make something like a movie inside of your head, your thought-waves are picked up by the helmet’s special sensors and fed into this computer. It then translates your thought-waves into electrical signals which are fed into the projection system. There is also a part of the computer that takes the feelings that you are having in your mind-movie and projects them out into the theater also.”

“And daddy,” says Sarah giving him a big hug, “when you make your wonderful movies, it feels so good!”

“Well, my darling, I’m glad you experience it that way. I hear some people don’t care for my movies and think they could do a better job themselves.”

“Oh dad, what do they know!” huffs Sarah indignantly.

Sarah’s Dad smiles at her, but inside there is a faint sense of sadness as he wonders if she will still feel the same after today’s experience.

“So, honey,” he continues, “as a special treat I have set up a kid-sized projection couch for you down inside the theater. That way you can best see and hear and feel the movie you are making.”

Lifting Sarah in his arms, they go down into *The Theater of Life*. He gently adjusts her special mind-matching helmet on her head and sits beside her, holding her hand and whispering softly into her ear:

“The trick, darling, is to relax. Don’t try too hard to make anything happen.”

With wide eyes Sarah stares at the huge movie screen as faint colors begin to swirl and play before her. “That’s me!” she cries in delight, “that’s just what I saw in my mind!”

“Very good, honey,” whispers her Father, though already his voice seems to be receding into the distance as the sounds of her own mind-play begin to fill the theater. Knowing that she will be fully absorbed for a while, Sarah’s Dad places her hand upon her heart and quietly waits.

Several hours have now passed. Sarah’s ability to create more and more realistic movies has mushroomed. She is totally engrossed in her creation, oblivious to her father’s loving hand on her shoulder or his suggestions that, perhaps, it might be a good idea to take a break and get some fresh air.

Finally Sarah’s dad gently removes the helmet from her head and watches as her confused face reflects the turmoil inside her.

“What happened?” she cries. After a moment, she focuses on her father and desperately lunges into his arms.

“Oh daddy,” she sobs, it was so wonderful, so beautiful, so, . . . oh, but daddy, I couldn’t find *you*. Where did you go?”

“I was right here beside you the whole time, honey,” he says as he strokes her hair and tries to comfort her. “But

you see, it often happens with this machine that someone becomes so absorbed in making movies that they totally forget who they are and everything that is real around them.”

“Oh daddy, please,” cries Sarah, “don’t ever let me forget you again.”

With tears in his own eyes, Sarah’s dad says nothing. He knows that with the coming years she must grow and find her own way, and he can only pray that she will continue to want to remember him.

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Seven years have now passed, and today is Sarah’s sixteenth birthday. As she has grown, she has taken every opportunity to go with her dad to *The Theater of Life* and practice using the mind projector. Sarah, as it turns out, is extremely gifted in this art. With her dad’s tutoring, she has become a projection virtuoso. But always she feels frustrated, for she can only use the equipment for a few hours at a time. Just as her “creations” are becoming really interesting, her dad reminds her that the *Theater* will be opening for business soon, and she is forced to terminate her creation.

Sarah’s dad is secretly relieved that circumstances keep her sessions short, for he knows how risky it is to project for long periods of time before one has first developed sufficient discipline and purity. Without the ability and will to constantly remember that one is the source of one’s fascinating and often seductive projection, one can easily become lost and experience great suffering, even as one continues to be the sole cause of this creation. He sees that eventually his daughter will mature into a highly skilled projectionist, but until then, . . . ?

Filled with adolescent self-assuredness, patience is the last thing on Sarah’s mind! For several years now she

has been begging, working, and sometimes scheming to win the one gift that will fulfill her aching passion: a very long period of time in *The Theater of Life* with which to do some real creating! She repeatedly dismisses her father's warnings and remains steadfast in somehow getting her way.

“Honey,” her dad has told her time and time again, “what you are asking is very dangerous. Even highly experienced adults have become lost in their mind creations and suffered terribly. With me by your side and a limitation of several hours, you are safe. But what you are asking for is,”

Well, it’s just too dangerous! Three days, she has demanded. Alone. Close the theater, she says. The others can live without movies for three days. I’ll do whatever you ask, only please, please, give me this one opportunity. The begging has been incessant of late, and he suspects there will be no peace in their home until she gets her way.

So, against his better judgement, he has agreed. Starting now, everyone else will be kept out, and for three days Sarah will rule as queen in the empty *Theater of Life*. With trepidation Sarah’s Dad watches as her great creation begins to engross every sense. While he may observe, Sarah has made him promise that he will leave her alone. Sadly, he sits in the back of the theater, watching, and praying with all his heart that no harm will come to his beloved daughter.

This first day has now long since turned to night outside. Within *The Theater of Life*, however, glorious daylight holds one adolescent girl completely spellbound. She has by now totally forgotten her role as creator of the “movie” surrounding her and has become completely absorbed in its drama.

Beautiful scenes appear from within her, seem to dance with a compelling life of their own, and call her ever deeper into the sensuous delights of their overpowering realism. Within this magnificently projected stage setting,

Sarah walks in her super-naturally attractive cinematic body. Free at last from the awkwardness and cosmetic imperfections of natural adolescence, Sarah exists in her fantasy as beauty and grace incarnate. Wherever she appears in her creation, the response is as if God Herself has just passed by. Gratified by this reverence, Sarah swells with pride and reaches ever deeper into her pool of unconscious longings for material to project into her creation.

The pool is vast, and another two days pass. In the back row of *The Theater of Life*, a heartsick Father waits and prays for his beloved daughter's safe return.

The third day is almost over, and Sarah's real body is now protesting more and more loudly against her abandonment of its needs. It has intruded its need for food into her projected fantasy more than once, and each time Sarah creates magnificent feasts and eats heartily. But her true hunger is not appeased, and she is driven once more to create food and experience herself eating it, yet her food-craving continues to roar inside.

Sarah feels tremendous frustration at this inability to appease her hunger in her projected "life." As her inadequacy in this most basic arena of living confronts her otherwise unlimited creative prowess, she finds herself becoming increasingly tired. Longing to rest, she projects a magnificent bedroom and pictures herself climbing into a deliciously inviting bed. Her eyes close, and she wills sleep. Hours later in her projected reality she awakes, desperately wanting to feel rested and refreshed. But nothing's changed. Once more she is confronted with her projective inability to deal with her very simplest of needs.

A tremor of fear ripples through her being, and a faint cry of despair escapes her now all-but-numb human lips. Her cry is heard, however, and from the back row the one who has been waiting comes forward, sits beside her, and gently begins to massage her cold and trembling hands.

"Honey," he whispers into her ears, "it's time to come

back, time to end this fantasy creation and return to reality.”

Lost within her projected dream, Sarah’s desperation has driven her to prayer. Kneeling beside her magnificent dream-bed, her dream-being pours out its dream-anguish to, . . . to, . . .

“Well,” ponders the all-but-perfect dream Sarah, “just who *do I pray to?*” Having been the creating deity of her own projected universe for three days now, it’s difficult for her to imagine a greater power to appeal to. Yet her anguish is intense, and it propels her to seek beyond the limits of her creation. As yearning makes space available for her heart to be heard, her inner ear can faintly perceive the sweetest sound:

“Honey, its time to come back”

“Oh daddy,” she moans, “is that you? Where are you? Why did you leave me?” As dream-tears roll down her dream-cheek, she becomes aware of another body, of a cold, achy lump of flesh being lovingly stroked by a gentle hand. In her exhausted mind, fragments of sentences float by.

“Darling, it’s time to stop now helmet off . . . time to come home”

The creator within her makes one last attempt to keep the movie going, but already the picture is getting fuzzy, the sound distorted, and the projected feelings increasingly confused. In her half-there, half-here consciousness, she calls out, “Daddy, help me, I feel so lost”

Gently two strong hands remove the helmet from her head and lovingly massage life back into her very cold body. Without the helmet to instruct the dance of the projector, the room becomes quite still and dark. After what seems like an eternity of living in her dazzling created universe, Sarah feels a sense of loss. But her father is quite close, describing the breakfast which awaits her at home and the simple, but real, bed on which she can truly rest afterwards. Too dazed and weak to walk on her own, Sarah allows her dad to lift her and carry her out of the dark *Theater of Life*. As they

emerge into the dawn of a genuine, shining day, Sarah's theater-dim eyes squint, and she cringes in pain. Setting her down on the dewy grass, her father waits patiently as she becomes used to the sun's growing light.

"That's ok, honey," says her dad soothingly. "I know it will hurt for awhile. But I'm here. And I'll stay right beside you all the way home." Taking her trembling hand, he gently leads as they continue onward.

Sarah turns and looks at his sweet face,
smiles,
and follows.

(This spiritual allegory plays with the idea of holding-on versus letting-go and is one of my favorites.)

Little Blue Ice

Once upon a time, there was a pretty little chunk of blue ice who lived in a plastic bag in a man's freezer compartment. Several of her sisters were stacked there beside her, and normally they led a pretty quiet life. Every once in a while, though, the man and his wife would prepare a picnic lunch. Then all of them would be loaded into the big ice chest and surrounded by all sorts of good things to eat. When this happened, the ice chunks were very happy, for this was when they got to do their work. All day long they would absorb heat in the ice chest, helping the food to maintain its freshness.

Now, as you know, when ice absorbs heat, its nature is to get soft and runny. Eventually, all its hardness goes away, and it just sits there in its little plastic house being bumped and stretched by everything around it.

Little Blue Ice, however, was different. She was an individual through and through! No matter what heat came her way, she would absorb it and absorb it. But never would she let so much as a tiny bit of her perfect hardness get soft. Naturally, then, she had to deal with much, much more heat than any of the other ice chunks. And because she never slushed in her little plastic bag like the others did, she hardly ever got knocked around and stretched out.

When the picnic was over, all the ice chunks were inspected. Those that seemed strong went back into the freezer. And during their long cold rest, these ice chunks would spend hour after hour dreaming. Always they had the very same dream, though it might vary in detail; each dreamt that she was part of a huge ocean of softened ice chunks. The joy was so intense, yet so very peaceful! And as

they waited patiently in the man's freezer, they longed to somehow go to that ocean, to be forever free of the little plastic houses in which they were now imprisoned. It all seemed so very hopeless, though. The plastic was *very* tough, and there didn't seem to be any way of escape.

Once one of the ice chunks saw something different happening in her dream: she saw the man coming home from a picnic, as usual, with all of them slushing wearily in the ice chest. All, that is, except Little Blue Ice, who remained as hard as ever. As he was inspecting each one before returning it to the freezer, he suddenly exclaimed, "Why I do believe *this* little bag is about to break – no point in keeping it any longer." So saying, he gently cut open the imprisoning bag and poured all the slushy ice down the drain. And it seemed then that this sister was no more.

Somehow, though, in this dream the voyage of the soft ice chunk was clearly visible. Twisting and turning through the pipes, she finally flowed into the sewer. There she met more soft ice chunks than she had ever seen before! And how merry they were as they all merged together, flowing happily down to the great ocean; their dream was real after all! So great was their happiness that they completely forgot who they were or where they had come from. Finally the great ocean embraced them and merged them into its all-encompassing vastness.

Well now, you can imagine the ice chunk's eagerness when she awoke the next day! She immediately wanted to share everything with her sisters there in the freezer. And great was the joy when they heard her tale, for somehow each one of them remembered having had the same dream too. They talked with much excitement about how they also might reach the point where they were "about to break." Then, they hoped, they too would get torn open and poured down the drain that led to the great ocean. After much discussion, they agreed that the only way to make their little plastic houses wear out quickly was to absorb as much heat

as they could. Then they would grow soft and slush back and forth, stretching their little plastic houses to the breaking point.

Little Blue Ice didn't have much to say during all this. She just sat there being very hard and thought to herself, "Let these silly children have their games. I know what's important in this life, and it's being hard! I'll never let myself go soft like these fools. They just don't have any pride in themselves!" Of course, Little Blue Ice had had the same dream as the others. But because her hardness was so very important to her, she dismissed it as "only a dream" and didn't really believe in the great Ocean.

Even though her sisters coaxed her and pleaded with her, she wouldn't give in. All the others were very sad, for they were sure it was because she just didn't understand that she remained so very hard. But since there seemed to be nothing they could do for her, they left her alone and continued slushing and stretching as best they could.

The rest of the story is very simple. After each picnic, the man inspected the ice chunks, and each time, now, he found two or three more that were worn out and ready to break. And just like in the dream, he cut them open and poured them down the drain where they flowed to the great ocean, which almost seemed to be waiting to receive them. Little Blue Ice, however, remained as hard as before. Through the coming of new ice chunks and the passing of old ones, never once did even the tiniest speck of her body go slushy. But when she saw a sister being cut open by the man and poured down the drain, she quivered slightly in her little rigid self, for in her eyes she could see only the death of one who had been close to her.

Well, as you know, nothing lives forever – not even the very hardest of ice chunks! One day when the man was on a picnic, someone accidentally knocked over the ice chest and all of the little ice chunks were scattered this way and that. The man picked them all up and put them back into

the ice chest – all, that is, but Little Blue Ice. Somehow she had slid under a bush, and no one saw where she had gone. She was a valiant ice chunk, though, and was determined to keep on absorbing heat, no matter what.

The next day, went he sun rose in the east, its light fell directly on her battered little plastic house. Never before had she felt such heat! This was more than she could bear! Little by little she felt the dreaded slushiness coming over her, the softness which she now could no longer resist. Soon the pressure in her little plastic house became unbearable, and the inevitable happened – she exploded! Her soft, slushy body was scattered over the ground and seemed to be lost forever.

But the sun kept on shining, and with its powerful rays it pulled all the soft blue ice up out of the ground and into the clear blue sky. In time, clouds gathered, and a mighty rain was formed which included all the pieces that had once been Little Blue Ice's former body. It poured down out of the sky, and soon, she found, she too had merged into the ocean.

At last she knew that their shared dream had been true after all! No longer fighting to retain the distinct hardness of her former “self,” she relaxed and accepted the soft flowing peace and bliss which had been her true nature all along.

(This story is set in India and focuses on how our hurtful habits end up hurting us, and how ultimately we must change and become harmless. It is also descriptive of the spiritual path and the transformation required of us to attain our Heart's Longing.)

The Snake

Once upon a time there lived a snake. As is the nature of his kind, he used to pass his days crawling upon the earth, killing things, and eating them. Since his poison was very strong, he ate well and soon grew quite large. Using a trick known to such beings, he never once tasted his own bitter poison.

One day, while searching for food, the snake passed by a holy man who was deep in meditation. There was something unusual radiating from this man, and the snake paused for a moment to look at him. After a short while, the man opened his eyes. Then in the most gentle and loving voice the snake had ever heard, the holy man said, "Brother snake, I see you are in need of a boon. I give to you my heart's blessing: may you find Peace."

The holy man then seemed to fade away, and the snake was left alone to ponder.

"Now what was that all about?" he wondered. Nothing seemed to be different, yet a gift from a man who can dissolve into thin air was not to be ignored. After much pondering that seemed to lead nowhere, the snake returned to his search for dinner.

Soon he saw a tiny creature nearby, and out shot his poison-laden tongue as usual. But instead of the expected gratification, what filled him was piercing agony! Its fiery pain coursed through his entire body and was so intense that he could barely remain conscious.

As he lay there, not knowing whether he would live or die, he recalled his meeting with the holy man. At that

moment, he somehow knew that he had lost his immunity to his own poison.

“This is a blessing?” he cried in the agony of his suffering. “Such a blessing I could do without!”

But there was nothing to be done for it, and after awhile the pain eased and he could sleep. Soon, though, hunger woke him and quite forgetful of his recent experience, he went out again in search of food.

Once more he located his prey, once more he struck, and once more he found himself writhing in the pain of his terrible poison.

This went on day after day. It seemed that each morning he had completely forgotten the experiences of the previous days – all except his gnawing hunger. And so, refusing to change his ways, he grew thinner, and weaker, and sleepier. In his nights of self-pity, he did not even notice that the holy man often came to his hole, leaving many tasty foods there for him to eat.

Much time passed, and the snake often felt death was near. But since he was too stubborn to change, he could only suffer and wait. Without his power to hurt the small creatures, he found that slowly they lost their fear of him and would often gather near his hole. Lying there, he would listen as they shared among themselves discoveries of good places to find food.

So in time he came to learn of a special garden not too far away where all creatures were welcome to eat and live in peace. But still, even as death danced closer and closer to his door, he clung to his pride and stubbornness and refused to go there.

Finally, though, the gnawing hunger inside and the sweet descriptions of the little creatures persuaded him to give it a try.

It was dawn when he arrived. The cool morning dew washed his dusty body as he meekly explored this green and healing place. He tasted this and that, and to his

amazement, he found that the tiniest bites gave him wondrous strength and brought fresh life to his weary being. While lying in the peace of this wondrous garden, he happened to notice a shimmering light growing stronger before him. As it became more solid, he saw the very holy man whose boon he had cursed so long ago. As their eyes met, the snake saw in his heart the true essence of the wise one's blessing.

"I have been waiting for you to come here for a long time," said the man softly. "You know, I built this garden for the enjoyment and nurturance of all creatures. But when you were so preoccupied with your own poisoning of things, you could feel no desire to come here. Now, because through your suffering you have renounced the use of your poisonous tongue, you have become capable of receiving the sweetness here. So welcome, brother snake. I offer you my heart's blessing."

And this time, the snake knew that this was a blessing he could not do without.

(This Christmas story, like Sarah's Dad, starts with a fantasy about our desire to control our world. It plays with what was science fiction at the time of writing, but has become virtual reality technology today. Yet the exploration between mother and daughter that follow, of relationship, meaning, and love are, if anything, even more crucial and relevant than when it was written.)

‘Twas the Night Before

As eight year old Jenny snuggles deeper into her mother's lap, she stares intently at the television. It is 7:57 p.m. on Christmas Eve, and everybody – just everybody – has been awaiting the glimpse-of-the-future Christmas special due in just three minutes: Christmas 2020.

“Mommy,” asks Jenny as they wait, “how old will I be in 2020?”

“Let's see, Honey, . . . hummm, why you'll be a teenager by then!”

“Humph,” mutters Jenny, who at this moment wants nothing so much as to be an eternal child and be able to play with the wonderful toy-of-the-future which the TV teasers have been promising to reveal tonight.

After the usual boring stuff at the beginning, the show opens on a family busily opening presents. Little Jimmy is ecstatic – he really got the gift he had been longing for: a *Mega-Nintendo Mind Theater*. The narrator explains how, from the video game craze of the 1980's, giant toy-maker Nintendo just kept growing and growing, making more and more realistic electronic games for each new Christmas. But in this year of 2020, he announces, Nintendo has finally created the ultimate toy.

The camera zooms in on Jimmy as he eagerly puts on the *Mind Theater* helmet, sits back into an easy chair, and appears to fall asleep. But Jimmy is anything but sleepy, as

all can see when the camera moves past his face and slips inside his dancing mind. The animated detail shows how the helmet of the *Mind Theater* picks up his thoughts and fantasies, brings them into the *Mega-Nintendo* computer, and then projects back into his mind the world he longs to experience in completely realistic detail.

After the narrator has finished explaining how the ultimate toy works, all are whisked along as Jimmy creates his magical world in which he actually *is* a knight in shining armor, rides a huge prancing horse, and faces down the fiercest looking dragon any child ever conjured into being.

But this is no ordinary child's game we are watching. For Jimmy, this experience is a reality more intense – more “real” - than anything he has ever experienced. The power of the *Mind Theater* is so great that he totally forgets outer reality and experiences with every nerve in his body and mind the thrill and danger of the fire-breathing dragon he is about to spear with his enormous lance.

The daring deed done, a cheering mass of people lift their hero from his horse and carry him through the city. The camera slowly pulls back from his inner mind, allowing all to see his smile of satisfaction. Just before the show ends, the camera lingers on his little sister tugging at their mother's arm and demanding, “I want my turn!”

As her mother turns off the TV, she notices that Jenny has lost herself in her own *Mind Theater* fantasies.

“Well, Honey,” she whispers gently, “I’ll bet that will be some toy, eh?” Jenny slowly returns from her reverie, nuzzles a bit closer in her mother’s arms, and looks at her with a slightly puzzled expression on her face. “Oh Mommy,” she says, “while I was watching the show, I wanted one of those toys so much – it seemed like everything I had always wanted. But now that it’s over, something feels funny. At the end Jimmy seemed so”

Stroking her hair, Jenny’s Mom waits patiently as she

tries to sort out her thoughts. After a few moments, Jenny faces her Mom and, looking much older than her eight years, says, "I know you love me, Mommy. And I know it by what we do together. You cook for me and take me places and play with me – you and me together, right?"

"Right, Honey. And I do love you very much."

"Mmmmm, . . ." murmurs Jenny as she cuddles close, savoring the sweetness of her mother's words. Still sorting out her thoughts, she continues. "I love it when you tell me you love me, but even if you didn't ever say it, I'd still know, because your love is just there when we do things together. But that little boy in the TV show – he was all alone. He was getting everything he wanted, but there was no one for him to love, and no one to love him. Except in his head." Pulling back and looking severely at her mother, Jenny says, "If that's the way it's going to be in the future, then I don't want it!"

Matching her daughter's seriousness, Jenny's Mom looks at her and asks, "Well then, Honey, what kind of future do you want?"

"Oh that's easy, Mommy! I want all the girls and boys to have wonderful mommies and daddies like I do, and to play nicely together like I do with my special friends. But Mommy, sometimes I wonder if other kids want that also. When I watch TV or listen to the kids at school, almost all they ever talk about is getting stuff and how they are going to make their parents do what they want. Nobody talks about love or how good it feels to snuggle up with their Mommy. How come?"

"Oh Darling, that's such a big person question, and I'm not sure I can really answer it for you. But let's try this: let me ask you some questions and perhaps you'll be able to answer it for yourself. OK?" Jenny nods approval and her mother continues.

"Now, tonight is a very special time, right? How

come, Honey?"

"Well," says Jenny, "a long time ago at night the baby Jesus was born and we celebrate His birthday tomorrow."

"That's right, sweetheart. And we give each other presents to remind ourselves of the presents brought for the baby Jesus so long ago. But tell me, what was so important about Jesus getting born that we still celebrate it thousands of years later?"

Jenny is thoughtful for awhile and then tells her mother what she heard at Sunday school. "Before Jesus was born," she begins, "people were very unhappy. They were like slaves to the mean Romans and they kept praying to God to send someone to make them free. Then after Jesus came, they didn't care so much if they were poor outside because He showed them how rich they were inside with His Father's Love. Right?"

"How did you get to be so smart?" asks her Mom with a big grin. "Of course you're right. Sometimes when people talk about that time before Jesus was born, they say that it was a terrible time of darkness inside, and that when Jesus came He brought a wonderful kind of Light that made people feel good and loving inside."

Jenny retreats into thoughtfulness again and then says, "Last week when Rachel invited me to her house for their Hanukkah celebration, she told me about how the candle flames represent God's Love and Light and His taking care of us. And her Mom also said that our holidays for remembering God's Light – Hanukkah and Christmas – are very close to a special Earth Holiday: the Winter Solstice. She said that after a half a year of the nights getting longer and the darkness outside getting bigger, the Solstice is the birthday of the return of the Sun, of the days getting bigger and the night getting smaller."

"Rachel has a very wise mother, Darling. And you're pretty smart yourself for remembering all that. Now, how

about us seeing if we can connect what you were just saying with your question about people not caring so much today about love. Do you think there might be a connection?

Jenny is quiet for a long time, and her mother is afraid the challenge is too great for her little girl. But Jenny is no quitter and keeps playing with it.

“Mommy, when I watched that TV show and pretended I was playing with the *Mind Theater* also, it was a lot of fun. But I was all alone inside of me. The only light was in my head, and it was pretty, but not as wonderful as snuggling close to you. When I feel how much I love you and how much you love me, that’s like a very bright Light inside, much brighter then when I play by myself. Maybe when the baby Jesus came into the world, it was like now, like just before the Solstice when the dark was very big. Maybe He was like the candles Rachel’s family light to remind them of Light and God’s Loving them, like when I’m hurt and you hug me and Love me and I feel better.”

Jenny’s Mom shivers in awe at the wisdom of the angel in her arms and imagines the Light that will shine through her as she grows into her full womanhood. But one more step needs to be taken in her mental dance and her mom says, “Right on, kiddo! Now, what if we imagine that our world today is sort of like that world when Jesus was born.”

“But Mommy, protests Jenny, in those days the people were like slaves to the Romans, and very poor. Today we’re free and pretty rich, aren’t we?”

“Well perhaps on the outside, Honey. But what about in our hearts? In the hearts of kids you were talking about on TV and at school? Are they rich in love like you are?”

“No, Mommy – that’s what makes me so sad! And they seem so intent on getting things and making others do what they want. They think that proves how free they are, but I wonder . . .”

“I wonder too, Honey.. The people I know are pretty much like the people you know, only bigger. But they mostly seem so lost in trying to get what they want that there’s almost no room left for getting close and snuggly and feeling good together. And if you’re not free to feel good together, what kind of freedom is that?”

Jenny catches her Mom’s meaning and jumps right in. “So if Jesus were born today, He’d have to free us from thinking about ourselves so much, right?”

“Yep,” says Jenny’s Mom, “and you want to know a secret?”

Jenny waits wide-eyed as her Mom whispers, “He is being born today – right now, right here.” Putting her hand gently on her daughter’s heart, she continues. “Every time someone overcomes their dark ignorance with understanding, with greater love for others, the Divine Light is being born a little more in her heart. And you know something, Honey? Every kind of people that ever lived wanted more of that Light. Sometimes they’d forget about what they really wanted and get lost in wanting silly stuff like the kids you told me about. And sometimes they call that Light or God by different names. One people might call it Truth, another might call it Buddha or Divine Mother or Christ. You and I call it Love, and tonight is special because it’s the birthday of when Love got born as a person a long time ago to help us remember, to help that Light in our hearts grow brighter and shine for everyone to see.”

Jenny smiles softly, nods, and says to her Mom, “that’s what was missing from that TV show. The Light that kid had was just for him – he didn’t share it with anybody. But when you help me see the Light in my heart, then I can share it with you, and with Rachel, and with, . . . with everybody!”

“Oh Darling, you’re wonderful! What you just said is the very best Christmas present anyone ever gave to me!”

With Joy overflowing, Jenny says, “Mommy, I can really feel it! It’s like a Light got born in my heart, and I want to share it with everyone!”

“Me too, Honey. Me too.”

“Mommy, maybe this is what Christmas really means. But if that’s so, then we’ve got a lot of work to do. I mean, we have to take care of this Light and find ways to help our friends see it in their hearts also. Right?”

~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Outside their window, bells are ringing in a nearby church. On the sidewalk people move briskly through chill night air on their way to worship. And in a warm living room, enveloped in loving arms, the living *Child of Light* is born and begins once more to transform the world.

(This story was written when I was living with my Guru in His ashram in the 1970s. It was my awkward attempt to reflect back to Him some of what I understood of the nature of the guru-disciple relationship and the Guru's mission. It may also speak to any of us struggling with surrendering self-will to Divine Will and truly becoming instruments of Light.)

Dad's Truck

Once, not so very long ago, a wonderful Man came to our town from "the old country." Before he arrived here, He had earned an immense fortune. And because of his love for those of us who He lovingly referred to as His children, he had become a philanthropist of the very best kind.

Soon after His arrival, He set up a general store that specialized in "soul food." His purpose, though, was only to give food freely to those who were hungry. There was never any charge for this food, and so unique was this store that no satisfactory name could be found for it. So, in time, it came to be known simply as "Dad's." Now when Dad came over from the old country, he brought with him a fleet of vehicles, most of them delivery trucks, to help him distribute the food. Alas, as with most enterprises, it happened that not all of the helpers were fully committed to the work. In Dad's fleet of delivery vehicles, there was one red truck which was like that.

Though it seemed to perform like the others, at night it would secretly steal away from the garage and go zooming off to the country. There it would pretend it was a fancy sports car or some fine luxury limousine. It would rev up its truck engine way past its limits, take bumpy roads at double the speed it was built for, and generally ignore all the rules of behavior appropriate to a delivery truck.

Not that the red truck was so bad, really, but, . . . well, you see, in its little truck-heart, the rust of jealousy had begun to corrode its vital parts. It would see Dad getting into one of His limousines or sports cars for an outing, and it yearned to be the one to carry Him here and there. Even

though it knew its work was of no lesser value to Dad than that of His “personal” cars, still it could not control its selfish jealousy. It continuously went in to the night alone, and after a while, it had just about ruined its once fine engine and body. In addition to the corrosion of the night’s dew on its metal parts, there was another factor adding to the damage: all of Dad’s fleet had a special kind of oil in their engines. During the service of the day, it flowed so smoothly that it just about eliminated any friction whatsoever. But it not only lost its lubricating ability when misused at night – it actually became gritty and abrasive, creating a horrible mess inside the engine.

Now Dad always took the very best care of His trucks, for He wanted the delivery of His fine food to be of the same high quality as the food itself. He gave them every advantage: the best fuel, expert maintenance (which he personally supervised), and highly skilled drivers who were just as gentle and loving as Dad himself.

Even in the old country, all the other trucks knew what the jealous red truck was doing, and they all tried as lovingly and skillfully as they could to persuade it to cease its folly. But they dared not confront the truck openly with its misdeeds, for in addition to its nightly pretensions to grandeur, it had developed a very un-trucklike sensitivity to criticism. So when their gentle advise was not heeded by this vain masquerader, all they could do was let it continue until the truck discovered for itself the error of its ways.

By the time Dad and His fleet had gotten settled in our town, it was obvious to everyone that the red truck was not performing as it should. The years of misuse had taken their toll, and now its rings were so worn that not even half of the fuel it burned went into doing its assigned work. All the rest either billowed out as black smoke, causing great annoyance to everyone near it, or else ended up as messy carbon deposits in the engine, which further impaired its ability to do anything useful. Dad, with His tremendously

loving heart, gave the truck lighter and lighter loads to carry. Even so, the deluded vehicle thought it was doing a tremendous job of service and congratulated itself often.

One Day dad was supervising the truck's maintenance as usual. By now the degeneration of the red truck's body and engine was quite severe. So Dad personally took over its maintenance, hoping that He could find some way to persuade the tired truck to allow Him to perform a badly needed engine overhaul, which was the most urgent of the pending repairs. The other mechanics had tried these repairs before, but such was the pride of the red truck that it refused to allow any mechanic under its hood except for the most minor work. And even then it groaned all the while and boasted to itself afterwards of how brave and selfless it had been.

Today, though, something was different. As Dad slowly approached the red truck, it recalled a conversation it had overheard the night before. The red truck had been alone, as was its habit, in a far corner of the garage. Since it was now too feeble to steal away for its nightly escapades, it was content to pass the time dreaming of past adventures or fantasizing new ones in its own personal land of make-believe. But suddenly it had become aware of voices close by, voices of several of Dad's other trucks talking quite seriously. As it listened more attentively, it learned that Dad was soon to be distributing the largest and most important shipment of soul food yet. The dispatcher had scheduled every truck to its maximum capacity, but still there was need of more work to be done.

Of course, no one mentioned the selfish red truck that refused to be made serviceable. Perhaps, though, it was the very absence of its name which caught the truck's attention. Somehow, it could not forget what it had heard.

As the night wore on, the red truck found it couldn't return to its fantasies as it had before. Some remaining spark of love for Dad still remained in its corrosion-pitted heart,

and it found itself wanting to help carry part of Dad's load. But as soon as this thought had entered its consciousness, the red truck saw quite clearly what it had chosen to ignore for the past few years. It saw how its selfish folly had made it incapable of being utilized, how the others had tried again and again to help it see its foolishness, how it had refused steadfastly to let the truth come near it, and how Dad in His mercy had not punished the red truck, but rather lightened its load again and again so that it might still think imagine itself a useful part of the fleet.

Any other time, such thoughts would have been quickly dismissed by the red truck's fantasy-drunk mind. Tonight, though, they returned again and again, and the red truck suffered greatly. Now, as Dad laid His gentle hand on the hood, gazing lovingly at the nearly ruined engine and the filthy body, the red truck felt genuine remorse for its past actions. And within its corrosion-pitted heart, there arose a longing to somehow be of true service. As Dad talked softly of the repairs that were needed, the truck, though racked with pain at even the thought of this work, slowly realized that it must allow itself to be transformed. And if it allowed the overhaul to be done now, it thought, perhaps it too would be able to help deliver the new arrival of precious soul-food.

But the pain! The humiliation! The utter helplessness of being dismantled!!! The weak red truck yearned for Dad to just "do it" and get the job over with. But Dad had often taught them that no meaningful repairs could take place without the vehicle's sincere cooperation.

What a dilemma! The pain of being overhauled was more than the red truck could possibly endure, it thought, and yet its yearning heart would not be satisfied until its self-inflicted damage had been repaired and it was once more serving in Dad's fleet as it had been meant to do. If only Dad would make the decision for the truck! If only He would force the change! At least then the red truck could comfort itself during the work with self-righteous

complaining and self-pity.

But even as the fear-ridden red truck looked pleadingly into Dad's peaceful and compassionate eyes, it knew the needed transformation could not happen that way. Just as Dad would accept only willing workers in His enterprise, so too was willingness to be made suitable for the work a requirement. What to do? What to do! In its extreme agony of conflict, the red truck lost consciousness of itself for a moment. That brief flash, however, was like a lifetime for the red truck, for it witnessed a Vision that revealed in its entirety Dad's beautiful life. It could not possibly relate afterwards all that it had seen and felt, but the gist of it was this: Over many years, there had been tremendous sacrifice as Dad had accumulated His fortune. And not just petty discomforts like an engine overhaul! No, Dad had come from a land beyond all pain and misery. He had originally lived in the Heavenly realms with complete Freedom and unlimited Joy as His very Self. And yet, saw the truck, having everything, He had volunteered in sweet willingness to come into the old country penniless, and to earn by the use of His will the Treasure that He now gave away so freely.

And the red truck saw in this flash just why Dad had done all this. It saw the Source from which emanated all that we call Good. It felt that Perfect Love, that unforgettable shining Presence which permeates all of Creation. And it saw within Dad's heart a willingness to serve those here on earth who had lost contact with this Source, whose souls hungered for the food of sweet remembrance which He would soon be freely distributing.

The red truck, having now felt this perfect Love, knew it could never again forget It.

The flash was over, and once more the red truck saw Dad's familiar face patiently waiting for its decision. But now it knew that it truly wanted the repairs to begin, and the red truck was clear that its sweet-willed cooperation would

be with Dad constantly throughout the overhaul.

As Dad looked at the truck once more before beginning the work, His smile seemed to ask, "What's your question, red truck?"

"Why, Dad – why?" it sputtered, "Why did You not punish my selfish folly instead of rewarding it with this wonderful Vision,? Surely I am not worthy of what You have given me!"

Dad smiled His wonderful soft smile and His sweet voice said, "I had no choice, really. You see, red truck, the yearning of your heart called to Me so strongly that not even the silliness of your follies could obscure its cry. When I heard your heart and its desire to change, to once more be able to truly serve, it drew from Me what you needed to be ready."

"Thank You, Dad," whispered the red truck with a depth of gratitude it hardly knew it possessed. "Yes, now I am ready." As He assembled His mechanic's tools and prepared to commence, Dad hummed a tune which filled the red truck with incredible longing to truly serve. It thought of load after load of soul food being distributed to thousands of hungry people. And even though it knew that the coming operation would be very painful, this seemed to have no meaning compared to the Joy of serving and the memories of its Vision of that Perfect Love which it could now feel radiating from Dad.

"Now please," said Dad, "be brave. And remember!
"Let us begin."

(This little fable about spiritual growth and the consciousness unfolding of this era was an early attempt at exploring attraction and repulsion as limiting factors in our human existence and how it might feel to overcome them. You could think of the metallic world of the story as our mundane physical existence and the “garden planet” as the astral realm from which we came and back to which our evolution is taking us.)

Clarity

Her name was Claire, and she lived on a tiny metallic planet. All of the people were metallic, and magnetic too. So all day long they would attract and repel each other, depending on which direction they were coming from. At night they would sleep in their metallic beds, feeling snug and safe in their metallic houses, securely protected from any possible radio transmissions from “out there.”

Now Claire was one of these metallic people, pretty much the same as most. But of late she had been feeling more and more weary of all the attracting and repelling that made up what everyone else called “life.” She had begun to spend more time away from the metallic buildings, away from the metallic people, and just sitting quietly by herself “listening” to the beautiful, but strange, radio transmissions from space that pulsated through her increasingly receptive body.

Over a period of time, Claire came to understand that these transmissions were very much intended for her to hear, and that by focusing her attention carefully, she could send transmissions also. This gave her great delight, and she would spend any free moments she could away from the others, sending and receiving from the mysterious source of these wonderful transmissions. Gradually she came to know that all of the enchanting signals she was receiving emanated from the heart of the Sun, which had been worshiped since the beginning of time, but was rarely understood as It truly is.

One day Claire was particularly weary from all of the attracting and repelling which made up her life. She had yearned and prayed for escape from this dreary existence, but always the transmissions had told here to stay, to learn, to unfold. On this particular day, though, Claire was at her end.

“Oh Great Source,” she pleaded, “I can’t go on this way any longer, Do with me as You will, but let this constant war of force-fields be done!” Having opened her heart, she sat quietly and waited.

Soon a marvelous, warm glow bathed her entire being, and she came to understand that, if she agreed, her precious Source would send a beam of transforming energy that would remake her body completely.

“Oh yes!” cried her heart. No questions, no conditions, just pure, joyful acceptance!. Instantly a flash of blinding Light engulfed her, and though she could feel fear rising, she sat quietly as this all-encompassing Light began to rearrange every molecule in her body. The power of it all was completely overwhelming! Just before she lost consciousness, she heard her beloved Source say, “As you are now receiving a new, more complete body, so too receive your new, more complete name. From this moment on, you shall be known as Clarity.”

When Clarity awoke, she tried to stand, but everything felt different. When she moved, she no longer felt the compelling attraction to the metallic earth. When she stretched a limb, it felt fluid, light, flexible. Afraid to move, she resumed her transmission-receiving posture and asked for guidance. Gradually the Source revealed to her the nature of her transformed body, how it had been changed from a metallic substance, hard and always at the mercy of magnetic disturbances, into a soft, flexible substance called flesh, which was quite unaffected by the attractions and repulsions of the metallic world.

Clarity was thrilled, but this posed some major

problems. She needed to learn to walk all over again, finding her own internal balance and sense of uprightness, instead of blindly relying on the magnetic pull of the planet. And the inner firmness that she had previously taken for granted now had to be consciously willed into use.

But oh my, what a sense of freedom! How clear and sparkling everything now appeared. Clarity was eager to share her miraculous experience with her friends back in town, and as soon as she felt able to get around in her new body, she returned to tell them her news.

Alas, most metallic people thought her a bit crazy but put up with her good-naturedly. Some refused to have anything to do with her. And a few, very few, were able to sense something wonderful in what she experienced, and they listened as she described the process.

“And this will work for you, also,” she told each one who asked, “if only you will take the time to establish communication with the Source.” They would nod and politely agree, but almost none did as she suggested. Even though this left Clarity feeling a bit sad for them, she was now beyond those ups-and-downs of emotions that were the constant companions of the metallic people. She was free and complete in her joy, and she knew the same blessings were waiting for each of her friends, whenever they chose to claim them. As Clarity’s life unfolded, she grew to experience first hand the meaning of the ancient teaching, “Live in the world, but be not of it.”

Now, after many years, it came to pass that there was a major disruption in the celestial mechanics of the metallic planet. A huge garden planet had relocated very close by in the same orbit around the Sun, and the two planets were quickly entering into a pattern of circling each other. One result of this change was that the people on the metallic planet were subjected to an intense gravitational pull, very different from the magnetic attractions and repulsions that had previously been the major forces in their lives.

Clarity observed with great interest all of the goings on, and especially the different ways that people responded to this new turn of events. Many people lived in terror, and they used all of their will to increase their magnetic clinging to their metallic planet, their signal-shielding metallic houses, and their attraction-and-repulsion relationships with the other metallic people.

But there was a growing number of people who had heard Clarity's message and had pondered the possibility of a life beyond mere attraction and repulsion. Even though the steadily increasing pull from the heavens was a great unknown in their lives, they were fascinated with the photographs which had begun to circulate of this nearing planet. Soon the planet was so close that anyone could see its beautiful features with a common telescope. Since Clarity was the only one among them who seemed to be completely unworried about the situation, many people came to her for advice and some understanding of what was going on.

So Clarity spent her last years on the metallic planet teaching, counseling, and simply loving each one who came to her. Through the transmissions from her Source, she already knew the inevitable outcome of this situation: sooner or later, all would be drawn from their metallic lives and, with transformed bodies like hers, become dwellers on the beautiful garden planet. It was just that she had invited the transformation earlier and therefore was able to enjoy the great celestial show free of fear. Others chose to wait and watched in a haze of worry and uncertainty.

As the planets grew closer together, Clarity found it more and more difficult to will to overcome the garden planet's attracting force. Without the magnetic pull that kept the others bound, she could allow herself to be drawn "upward" any time she choose. At last the long awaited transmission from her beloved Source arrived, and she knew her time had come. Sitting in humble gratitude for all she

had been allowed to experience, she surrendered more deeply then ever before and allowed herself to be drawn Home.

(This meditation allegory, written in the 1980s, seemed like science fiction at the time. But obviously current technology has evolved faster than could have been imagined then. So please, read this as you might an historical novel, and place yourself at the beginning of the computer age. . . or at the feet of a Guru teaching with delightful fantasy.)

Filename: Enlightenment

Research Journal

October 27, 2057

Before I go any further in this experiment, I must write down at least a brief history of my research to date, Then, if anything should go wrong,

I was just a boy when the Janus II became the standard personal computer. Attaching directly to the human nervous system via a neuro-socket connector, the Janus II had become an incredibly powerful device for expanding the possibilities of human consciousness. In addition to its own huge internal memory capacity, the Janus II, like its Roman God namesake, had another face. It was continuously “on line” via satellite with the rapidly expanding U.M.F. (Universal Main Frame) network, giving the Janus II user instant access to unimaginable quantities of information and programming.

As you must know, early this year computer technology achieved its crowning glory. At long last the U.M.F. was connected to the *Akashic Record*, the astral library of everything ever thought, said, or done in the history of Creation. Through my Janus II, I realized, I could now access realms previously available only to advanced mystics and spiritual adepts.

I had just come into my manhood when I first began these experiments. With the Janus II neurologically connected to my brain, I had no need of keyboards or other

crude mechanical devices to make my will known to the machine. After some practice, I learned to work with a “screen” within my mind, and just thinking a word would create its appearance there. Thought commands generated the requested actions almost instantly and with an incredible fullness of experience. Data was fed not only to my mind’s “screen,” but also to my visual cortex, my auditory nerves, my tactile sensors, . . . everywhere!

In time, I discovered that using this computer was amazingly similar to my human life generally. My mind was the “on line” creator of experience to whatever degree I was able to direct and control the U.M.F.’s data flow. This was no easy task, however, for it required staying focused on a specific goal, or filename, while navigating a maze of potentially distracting alternative possibilities.

If you are not familiar with this technology, perhaps a simple example will make the process clearer. Let’s say you are in Los Angeles and have a longing to re-experience your memories of a certain picnic with your grandmother thirty years back. You recall that in her home in Boston, in the attic, there is a chest with photo albums, and that in one of these there are photos which will evoke these memories within you. In effect, these photos become your “filename” or the “program” you need to access in order to re-experience that picnic from long ago.

So, holding the goal of seeing these photos, you embark on a series of actions, each of which must be chosen from a “menu” of possibilities. In this case, the first action might be to drop all your other activities and go to the airport. There you are faced with a “menu” of possible destinations. From all these various possibilities, you choose Boston, buy your ticket, and “experience” the transition to this new realm. Then, at Boston’s airport, you get a taxi and, from a “menu” of all possible destinations, you choose the address of your grandmother. On arriving, you are confronted with a “menu” of possibilities including

dinner, socializing, and a good night's sleep. From this "menu," you choose to go to the attic, find the chest, find the photo album, find the pages with the desired photos, and using them, finally "open" the file of memories for which those photos are the unlocking "program."

While this process may sound complex, we each do it every day, directed by internal forces with names such as desire, duty, and yearning. They keep us focused on our end goal and automatically make the correct choice in each new decision point or "menu" of possibilities. Of course, if one has multiple goals, some of which are in conflict with each other, then "getting somewhere" becomes very difficult, if not impossible. Therefore, the unifying element in all successful ventures is the presence of one overriding goal or aspiration which repeatedly motivates one to make the most appropriate choices until fulfillment is reached.

Well, in a sense, computers have always been fancy electronic ways of presenting choices which, when correctly navigated, offer the fulfillment of certain desires. Push the correct sequence of keys and the ideas in your head become a book; get distracted – make incorrect choices – and you get gibberish.

With the advent of the Janus II, this process bypassed touching mechanical keys and became driven directly from the mind of the user. We simply held the final destination "filename" in our mind as a succession of menus developed on the mind-screen. As long as the user remained steady in maintaining the vision of the final goal or filename, the correct menu choices were made automatically.

This year, when the hook-up with the Akashic Record went on-line, the subtlety of this process expanded beyond belief. Now, each new menu contains not only names, but actual experiences to be witnessed, understood, chosen from, and moved through. So, for instance, holding the goal of filename: *Relaxation* not only leads the user to the destination relaxation program, it is also a process of

witnessing, experiencing, and letting go of all inner conditions which are currently interfering with the user's ability to be in a relaxed state.

So, with this as background, let me now describe my experiments to date. During the past year, I have grown more and more sophisticated in using my Janus II. After much research, I finally discovered the existence of some little known files that are proving to be most interesting! It seems that the great transcendental experiences of mystics and Enlightened Ones can be shared, but it requires being able to hold unwaveringly the proper filename through the entire unfolding choice matrix.

Recently I discovered a secret that has now become my obsession: there exists a program for Divinity, and it can be accessed through a file named *Enlightenment*. Needless to say, all else in my life has been put on hold as I pursue this goal.

But, alas, the Ultimate Source does not divulge it's secrets so easily. Each time I begin a session of pursuing Filename: *Enlightenment*, I progress deeper and deeper into the succeeding menu choices. Holding a focused yearning to access Filename: *Enlightenment*, this intense aspiration acts as a homing device to guide me past increasingly seductive alternate programs. But sooner or later on each try something captures my consciousness and I find myself twenty or thirty choices down a path leading to a very different destination.

Awhile back I encountered a beautiful feminine energy which I've come to call Becca. Alas, she has now become a "choice" which continually captures my attention. In each attempt to reach Filename: *Enlightenment*, I seem to be accessing incredible depths of spiritual awareness. But at some point, before I know it, the focus of my power has completely switched over to creating experiences with Becca.

The strange thing is, I know that if I continue to

evoke her inwardly, I will eventually “create” meeting her in my physical life also. It would take fantastic concentration, of course, but I know it can be done. The power of people to “manifest” their desires in life is well known. With this computer system available to amplify my will, I do believe anything is possible! The question that haunts me, though, is, *What's really worth having?*

Sometimes when I think of being together with Becca – ah, what ecstasy! At these times I have such a deep longing to really be with her, to physically hold her, to live a normal life with a real person instead of spending all my time with this damn machine!

But then I remember my quest. My innards feel torn apart – which path shall I follow? I have waited so long, hungered so deeply to touch that Divinity within me! Now that I know how to access It, all other desires seem to fade. Ah, but not completely. Becca, . . . Becca?

October 30, 3037

It is almost midnight, and I have finally decided. My desire for Becca must be put aside! I WILL pursue the path to my heart's deepest longing!

I have been practicing feverishly these last few days and have gone deeper into the subtle choice-fields then I had ever imagined possible. It is getting harder and harder to return to “normal” consciousness after each session, and I am not at all sure what awaits me as I move into still subtler choice-fields. But I WILL go! Just recently I have chosen to move on past kingships, said no-thank-you and left images of delight that only last week would have turned me forever from this pursuit. Filename: *Enlightenment*, however, has a most wonderful characteristic: the deeper into it I go, the more seductive becomes the vision, the aura of that ultimate goal which I am now 100% determined to attain! In a few minutes I shall try once more, and if I am successful this time,

Editor's Note: *These are the last entries in the author's journal. Since then, no one has seen or heard from him. There are recurring reports, however, of subtle anomalies occurring as other peruse Filename: Enlightenment. Users all over the world are describing something new in the deeper reaches of the subtle choice-fields. It is described as a radiant presence that seems to offer encouragement and, some say, Love, as they develop their focus and move closer to accessing the Ultimate Program.*

(A peek into shyness and exposure in relationships.)

The Man with the X-ray Eyes

All day Dennis had felt as if he were adrift on an ocean of confusion. So it did not surprise him when, after crossing the street, he tripped on the curb and found himself sprawled out on the sidewalk.

“Yep, figures,” he muttered under his breath. Wishing he could just die, he lay there, oblivious to the stares of the passers by. Taking a glance around him – his last, he hoped – his eyes fell upon a dilapidated old sign over a store he had never noticed before. “*The Acme Joke Shop*,” it proclaimed, though it hardly seemed to belong on this upscale block in contemporary Boston.

“Just like me,” sighed Dennis, “a joke that just doesn’t fit.” But his curiosity was now aroused, and he decided not to die just yet. Instead, he picked himself up and walked into this store that seemed only slightly to belong to this current era.

Once inside, his suspicions were confirmed – this place wasn’t real! Dust lay thick everywhere, and he suspected he was the first customer to enter in months. A kindly looking old man sat at the far end, smoking a bizarre looking pipe and eyeing Dennis thoughtfully from behind thick, odd-shaped glasses.

“What is it, son?” came the soft voice. Dennis couldn’t answer, but neither could he pull his eyes from the gaze of this strange merchant. After several moments of silence, the man motioned Dennis to a counter on the side wall and said, “You’ll find what you’re looking for there, third bin from the left.”

Dennis automatically followed the old man’s

instructions and found himself holding a pair of glasses with spirals on the lenses. "X-Ray Glasses," read the tag. "See inside other people. \$1.59" Still somewhat dazed from his fall, Dennis paid the man and slowly walked back into the sunshine of an autumn afternoon.

Back in his apartment, Dennis once more became engulfed in his loneliness. He had been trying for so long to meet a woman who would think of him as more than "just a friend." But his innate shyness had always prevented him from exploring the obvious paths toward love. Why just yesterday, he recalled, he had been encouraged to attend the Singles Halloween Party being held nearby. But his habitual fear had uttered his refusal automatically. Now, though, as he looked at his recent purchase, he wondered.

"A costume party. Hummm, . . . What have I always wanted to be? That's it! *The Man with the X-Ray Eyes!*" His mind raced onward, designing his costume and creating a persona strong enough to make a call that ended with the words, "I'll be there!"

Saturday night arrived to find Dennis a bit nervous, but also quite excited. He had spent hours getting his costume to look just right, and there was an air of anticipation that made his eyes twinkle behind the strange looking joke-shop glasses. By now, he had spent so much time inventing his X-Ray Eyes personality that on some level he actually believed he would be able to see through the people at the party. He had, of course, had the usual male fantasies of seeing bodies not hidden by clothing. But this was not the thought that had truly captured Dennis' heart. Rather, he intended, as X-Ray Man, to seek a woman who was deep enough and loving enough not to reject him because of his shyness. He would look below the skin, he vowed, and maybe, just maybe, . . .

By 10:30 the room was so filled with strangely-costumed partiers that it felt like an episode from *The*

Twilight Zone. This suited Dennis perfectly. In his new personality as X-Ray Man, he was delightedly going from face to face and staring brazenly from behind the protection of his magical glasses. Perhaps it was just his imagination, but it felt as if he could actually do as he had fantasized – look deep into another's heart and see how she might respond to him. He was feeling so absorbed in his new identity that when the tiger woman pinched him and said, "Come on, big eyes – let's dance!" he was out there gyrating with the best of them.

"This is OK!" he thought as the music ended. But he knew she was not the one he had come here to meet, and so he continued his brazen staring into the eyes of each woman he encountered.

It was near midnight that his circuit of inspection brought him before the butterfly woman. She was completely enclosed by her costume, but through the small eye-holes in her mask, Dennis found a way to use his X-Ray powers. And what he saw lifted his heart. For underneath all the shimmering color of her costume, he saw a woman like himself. Shy, but determined to move on out. Somehow. He could tell that for her also creating a costume and a persona for this party was a new and somewhat terrifying adventure. He could feel her almost pull away under the intensity of his X-Ray gaze. But she didn't. Instead, after several minutes had passed, he heard a slight butterfly voice ask, "Can I try those?"

Over the noise of the party he wasn't sure if the words had come from her or from his own head. But he was so emboldened by now that he motioned her to follow him and they went out onto the porch. The air was still warm from an Indian Summer day, and it seemed natural, as they sat on the railing, to remove their masks and take deep breaths from this magical night.

After awhile, Dennis handed her the X-Ray glasses and allowed himself to be stared at also. It felt strange – no

doubt about it! But he didn't flinch, and soon she removed the glasses, smiled, and said, "Hi. I'm Jessica."

"I'm Dennis." Then, after an awkward moment, he ventured, "Umm, when you looked at me just now with those glasses on, did you, ah, that is, ah . . . ?"

Jessica broke the tension with her robust laugh, and soon Dennis exploded into laughter also.

Jessica was sporting an infectious grin as she finally quieted down enough to say, "Yes, Dennis, I saw you too. And I think we have a lot to talk about!"

The words then began to flow more easily, and they began to walk around the grounds. Suddenly Dennis realized he had left his X-Ray glasses on the porch, and they went back to retrieve them. But search though they might, the X-Ray glasses were never seen again.

And perhaps you can imagine what happened when, the next day, Dennis tried to locate the *Acme Joke Shop* to buy another pair?

(Another in the dating series, this story's Shirley is one of my all-time favorite characters! I have no idea how she came out of my head and onto the page, but I have delighted in her style and integrity ever since. I hope you will also.)

Engage-mint Tea

So here's ol' Shirley, the Department go-fer, shuffling her feet and waiting, . . . waiting again.

I've been sent on some weird errands before, but this takes the cake. The guy wrapping my package is moving like molasses and, well, . . . he's strange. Just like everything else in this crazy store. I wish Doc would get somebody else to pick up his "special" supplies!

All the stuff on the shelf is labeled in some foreign writing – makes it hard to browse. But wait a minute, here's something in English:

*Engage-mint Tea *** Guaranteed!*

Cute picture of a bride and groom too. Everything else is in squiggly type I can't read, so I take it to the counter and ask the slow-motion expert what's what.

"Oh, very good, very good! You have man you want to marry?"

"Now wait a minute," I mutter, let's not get personal! Oblivious, he continues.

"This, . . . how you call it? Ah, yes – love potion. You give to man – he become very interested in you! Yes! Make like tea – very good."

Now I'm not what most people would call outstanding in the looks department. And I have been trying

to get ol' Herbie down the hall to develop a little more of a personal interest in me, if you know what I mean. A new hairdo hasn't done the trick, so I figure, why not? I mean, a little imported herb tea's good for a guy, right?

So the next afternoon, when Herbie comes running into my office with some project that needs completing yesterday, I tell him Herbie, relax! Do your heart a favor and have a quiet cup of tea. Before he can say no I'm boiling water and the smell of mint is filling the room. Okay, he says, but he won't really sit down and enjoy it. I don't complain, though. I just smile and wait patiently to see what'll happen.

Two minutes later, tea gulped scalding, Herbie's on the fly yelling "Thanks!" over his shoulder. So much for miracles.

Next day, same thing, only this time he sits for a few minutes while reciting a litany of the department's woes. Very romantic. I'm thinking of asking for my money back.

One day, after a week of this afternoon tea-and-flee, Herbie suddenly stops mid-sentence and gives me the strangest look. Like he's meeting me for the first time and is awed by my beauty. Hey, I used to dream of being looked at that way when I was a teen, but I've pretty much accepted my plain reality for over a decade now. So at first I figure he's playing around and I stare right back at him. But then I get the feeling he's not playing, and I start to blush.

"What's the matter, Herbie, you been working too hard?" I kid him. Now he blushes too and looks away.

"Shirley, . . ." Boy, all of a sudden motor-mouth can't speak. I smile and wait patiently.

"Shirley, . . . would you, that is, if you're free Friday after work, maybe we could catch a bite and see, . . . um, . . ."

“Yeah, sure Herbie, I’d love too!” I don’t want the guy to loose his nerve. He smiles shyly and says “Great” and sort of edges out of the office, like he’s not quite sure what just happened. Me too. I mean, in my entire life I’ve never been looked at like that. And I kind of like it.

So Friday evening finally arrives and, after tea, we walk uptown for some food. I’m taking it cool, like this is standard weekend stuff for me. He’s not close enough to hear what my heart’s doing! Not yet, at least.

Well, the next several months are fantastic! We become a regular number together, and after my initial thrill at being so cherished calms down, I begin to look at ol’ Herbie with more dispassionate eyes. And the more I look, the more I fall for this guy. He really has just about everything I always dreamed of but was afraid to ask for. And he’s crazy about me! What more could I want?

As the time passes by, though, an awkward feeling that’s been gnawing at my innards gets stronger and stronger. He’s talking serious relationship now, and our conversations more and more point to us being wedded before too long. I’m in ecstasy, except for that knot in my innards. Like somehow I’ve cheated the Universe and gotten sweet Herbie unfairly. But heck, he loves me, he loves my “special blend” mint tea, and he wants to get married. So where’s my complaint?

My complaint, obviously, is that I haven’t the foggiest idea how Herbie would feel about me if I stopped making his special tea. After all we’ve done and shared together, I’m almost sure he’d feel the same regardless. But there’s only one way to really know, and I’m not at all sure I want to risk trying it.

One thing I do know, though, is that this last half year has been incredible! I’ve never felt so close to another

person. I don't know much about love, but whatever it is, I'm closer to it with Herbie than I'd ever thought possible. And that's making me bold! So here goes: the rest of the tea is down the drain, and my future waits unknown. But if Herbie *is* my future husband, I've just given him the very best engagement present a man could want.

(This story is a exploration of what it means to be truly intimate with another person. It contrasts technology with relationship, fantasy with real interaction, and gratification with generosity.)

Metamensch, Inc

The ad was small, but *so* enticing:

FIND THE MATE OF YOUR DREAMS!

You will experience a relationship with

your perfect partner

or double your money back!

MetaMensch, Inc.

636-7241

Well, after reading an offer like that, how could I refuse? So, here I am, in the waiting room of MetaMensch, Inc. Sure, I'm nervous, but like I say, how can I lose? So I read their promotional flyer once more, just to see if I've really got this straight.

“In the old days,” it says, “finding perfection in a lover was just about impossible. People spent thousands and thousands of hours in trial and error dating, getting-to-know-you activities, and misery when the ‘prospect’ turned out to have feet of clay. Now, thanks to the miracle of modern technology, you need never again settle for ‘second best’. By subscribing to MetaMensch, you are guaranteed perfection, however YOU want it! No more compromises!”

It was hardly believable, but I’d been through the ringer more times then I wanted to recall, and I was ready to try anything. Just then the manager comes out and says, “Welcome, Cindy – I’m so glad you came!” She invites me into her plush office, and as I recline in the easy chair she offers me, soothing vibrations creep into my nervous body.

I begin to experience a peace that has eluded me for the last decade. But before I can even guess what the cause is, the manager begins.

“What you are feeling is just a subtle hint of our service here. ‘Meta’, as you know, means ‘beyond’, and that is exactly where we are going to take you – beyond the frustrations and failures of personal relationships, into your own universe of pleasure and absolute satisfaction. All you need to do is make the decision to really enter into our modern world, to accept the joy and happiness that is your due in this year of 2052. And of course,” she added quietly, “pay our fee.”

After a discrete pause, she continued. “What we can offer you today is made possible by this electronic dream-come-true, the Cyber-Clone 4. After you have completed the necessary paperwork, your first session will consist of reclining in this chair with the Cyber-Clone helmet on your head. In just under two hours, this machine, . . .” she paused and stroked the Cyber-Clone 4 fondly, “will read and store the entire contents of your mind – every experience, every dream unfulfilled, every fantasy waiting to burst into action. This information is then encoded into a tiny memory chip which we mount in a special ring for you to wear. Only you can have access to this.

“In your future sessions, you place the ring into this opening in the Cyber-Clone 4, relax in the helmet-chair, and experience the relationship of your dreams. Are you aware of the name of your perfect man?”

“Well,” I admitted, “I have always been partial to Robert.”

“The Cyber-Clone 4 will know that, as well as his looks, personality, likes and dislikes, plus thousands of other aspects that you are not yet even aware of. When you climb into the helmet-chair, you will enter an interactive reality with Robert. I could tell you more, but with our absolute guarantee, there’s no reason not to try the experience

yourself. When would you like to begin?"

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

The reception area at MetaMensch is quiet, and I am sitting alone for awhile before leaving. It's been four months now since I've been "dating" Robert, and I must admit, he's everything they said he would be. We have been to Rome together, made love on countless beaches, shopped for my jewels and fine clothes together, spent endless hours gazing at the stars, and all within my hour appointment at MetaMensch each week. They were right – this is perfection beyond my wildest dreams! And the reality of our relationship is so much more intense then anything I've ever experienced before. Robert is like a god to me, and kind beyond words. Sometimes as I'm leaving a session and replacing Robert's ring on my finger, I think I can even feel his soul touching my skin. And yet,"

In my reverie I hadn't noticed that someone else had entered the room. When I opened my eyes, I saw a short, slightly balding man slumped in a chair, obviously exhausted and, I thought, confused. I found him rather unappealing to look at, but there was something in his expression that reflected the questions that were hovering just below consciousness in my own mind.

I guess I must have been staring at him when he opened his eyes and moaned, "Martha?" Slowly he focused and then blushed awkwardly when he saw he was with a stranger.

"I'm Cindy," I explained, trying to ease his discomfort.

"I'm Sid," he replied. Then painfully, "I, . . . I miss her so much when these sessions are over. . . ."

"Your perfect woman?" I offered, and he nodded.

"I understand. It always takes me awhile to readjust when my time with Robert is over. How long have you and Martha been 'going' together?"

“It’s been almost a year now, and I don’t know how much longer I can take this. Since we ‘met’, I haven’t even looked at other women, but sometimes, . . . sometimes I get this hunger for. . . for, . . . I don’t know. And I feel so confused. . . .”

“I think I know what you mean,” I shared. Robert has fulfilled my every desire so perfectly, and yet, . . . I can’t put it into words either, but something is missing.”

We sat there for a few moments in silence, alone in our shared plight. I could feel my stomach rumbling and knew I should head home for dinner. But just now, being with another human being seemed very important.

“I, . . . yeah, . . . me too – something is missing, though I feel somehow disloyal to Martha even thinking that. I’ve never, I guess, admitted that to myself, let alone any one else. And I don’t even know you.”

My mind was beginning to click now, and I really wanted someone to explore these new ideas with. “Could we, I mean, would you be willing to talk some more with me about this? I asked. “Maybe we could eat together downstairs?”

“I’d like that!” he grinned. As he looked at me with his impish smile, something passed between us, something I hadn’t felt with Robert in any of our wonderful adventures together. It wasn’t even that pleasant, but it was clearly human. This man could offer me no experience that Robert wouldn’t supply a hundred times better, but in the fact of his human reality, he was supplying something else, something that my “perfect” relationship had been unable to offer. I had to find out what that was, and I had a hunch that Sid was going to help me find it.

Part Two
The FAA Tackles MetaMensch

It is New Year's Eve, 2055. The bell rings, and Cindy opens the door to greet the radiant face of her lover Sid. After a kiss that makes her wish that they weren't going out that evening, Cindy gets her wrap and walks with Sid to the party.

“SURPRISE!!! SURPRISE!!!”

As they enter the house, dozens of voices greet them. On the far wall is a banner proclaiming, **“We Love You, Cindy and Sid”**

“What the, . . .” cries Cindy.

Dinnie hugs her and says, “We decided it was high time you two received a little recognition for all you have done these past two years to make Fantasy Addicts Anonymous – our FAA – a reality. So this evening is a tribute to Sid and Cindy! Well, don't just stand there . . .”

Hugs are exchanged all around, and soon Mark claps his hands and asks everyone to come together in a circle.

Dinnie begins. “I remember seeing these guys at the very first organizing meeting for the FAA two years ago. They were so scared as they tried to tell us how they had met at MetaMensch, and how confused they were after all those months of ‘dating’ their ideal mates via the Cyber-Clone 4 computer. I remember, Sid, your description of that first dinner you two had together, how hard it was to help each other understand what didn't feel right with the ‘perfection’ of your MetaMensch partners.”

“Oh God,” mumbles Sid, “did we ever feel awkward that night! But Cindy was so persistent that we gradually got beyond all that and finally began to understand what had happened to us.”

“That's right,” continues Dinnie. “I remember the story you told about the experiment with the pigeons. The one where they put electrodes into the pleasure center of the pigeons' brains and put them in a cage with two levers. Pressing one gave them food, the other a pleasure-jolt. The crazy birds just kept pleasure-jolting themselves until they

died of starvation! You said you'd always been haunted by that story, and somehow it came to mind as Cindy was describing her 'love affair' with her perfect partner Robert."

"Oh, I was so mad at him," said Cindy, "when he implied that what we were doing with the Cyber-Clone 4 was no different, really, than what the birds had done. But then I got to thinking about my life, how pale and unimportant everything else had become in comparison to my time at MetaMensch. I tried to deny that this 'perfect' relationship was ruining the rest of my life, but Sid was so sweet and accepting of my inner struggles that I finally was able to see it. Then he told me about his earlier experiences with Alcoholics Anonymous and what he had learned about the nature of addictions. Slowly I began to see how this applied to our MetaMensch experiences. I could even see that something in me wanted and needed to change. But I certainly wasn't ready to give up my wonderful Robert just then!"

There is a long pause as each one recalls the intensity of their own attachment to their MetaMensch partner.

Mark can't keep quiet any longer. "What happened next," he blurts out, "was really incredible. I mean, any one else would have just been delighted to get free of their addiction and go off happily into the sunset with their new, 'real' lover. But not these guys. Even before they were 'recovered' from their own addictive patterns, they were planning how to help the rest of us become aware of ours. Now that's what I call real caring!"

After hearty agreement all around, Dinnie continues.

"So, that's how the FAA came into being. I remember that night when we first met, Cindy. You looked so cold, standing there outside the doors of the MetaMensch office, passing out invitations to the FAA meeting. I was amazed at how rude people were to you as you tried to explain about fantasy addictions. They were so vehement in denying that their MetaMensch relationships had anything

to do with fantasies. And they looked so scared when you asked them to just consider the possibility that there might be something more to a relationship then they could find in their computer-glorified experiences.

“Your fliers were so cute, too – that headline sure got my attention:

*Learn How To Fly So That You Really Get There!
Ask the FAA*

“I was still quite satisfied with my MetaMensch mate at that time. But as we talked out in the cold, I was struck by a deep warmth that radiated from your eyes. I didn’t give a hoot about the FAA just then, but I was really drawn to see you again. So I came to the meeting.”

Cindy looks at Dinnie with great love and remembers the countless hours they have worked together in these last few years. It was Dinnie who had insisted that their program include a large measure of physical contact, and she had organized the first massage workshops oriented toward helping recovering FAAers get more in touch with their bodies. Now, of course, it is understood how vital physical contact and body awareness is in the process of separating fantasy from real essence. But back then,

There’s quiet as each one remembers the long and sometimes painful process of reclaiming freedom and feeling in their bodies. Confronting the fears and habits of constriction which had evolved into their addictions originally had not been easy. But in its wake had come a joyful sense of really being alive and of being in community with others who had freed themselves from the bondage of their cravings.

After awhile, Mark stands up and suggests a short break before they continue. “Then,” he says, “we have a surprise to for you.”

A globe in the center of the room has just become radiant, and as rays of brilliantly colored light begin to dance from within, the group becomes silent and gathers around to watch. Images of dancing are seen within the holographic projection-sphere, and soon all are joining in a rollicking circle of merriment.

When the time has come to continue their narrative, Mark gently guides the gathering into a sitting circle. It is quiet now, and all are eager to hear the story that is about to unfold.

“After Fantasy Addicts Anonymous – our FAA – began to seriously undercut MetaMensch’s business,” he begins, “they put their research department on a 24-hour a day crash program to devise a small, portable substitute for the Cyber-Clone 4 computer. They figured that if clients didn’t have to come to their offices to be with their ‘perfect mate’, then it would be a lot harder for us to find them and put our ‘unprofitable’ ideas into their heads.

“Well, with all that backing, it didn’t take long to perfect and market what they termed ‘*the new wave*’ in dating perfection – the ultra-chic, personal MiniMensch.’ You all remember last decade when neuro-socket connector operations began to be popular. People were ‘plugging in’ to computers for a whole variety of experiences, and no one can deny that this has been the greatest advance in ease of education since speech was invented. When MetaMensch originally began their business, they had opted for the helmet-chair approach because it was a way of monopolizing their invention. But as we became more successful at teaching their clientele about fantasy addictions, MetaMensch was forced to utilize the neuro-socket connector system to make their new product portable.

“What happened since MiniMensch hit the market amazed just about everybody. MiniMensch couplings swept the affluent classes with a force equal to the cocaine craze of the 1980’s. Even though the MiniMensch package cost

almost a full year's salary for a well-paid professional, there were three-month waiting lists at every office. The walk-in, once-a-week in the helmet-chair trade was still brisk, but the FAA was growing quite effective at getting these folks to consider what MetaMensch was doing to the rest of their lives. That long week between 'dates' was our ally.

"With the MiniMensch, though, a 'dating' addict could 'go out' as often as she or he wished. As you know, the device is no larger than a Walkman player, and it connects directly into the nervous system via the standard neuro-socket at the back of the neck. So the thrill of sweet romance could be had anywhere – the absorption of television and the intensity of drugs available at the mere push of a button!"

I'm sure you've all seen these *Menschies* lost in their fantasies on park benches, in subways, at restaurants, and wondered at that strange bedroom look on their faces. These, of course, are the hard-core cases we call 'Frequent Flyers'."

Everyone nods knowingly, some with very recent memories of this terrible addiction. After a few deep breaths, Mark continues.

"Of course, we at the FAA did all we could to adapt our program to this new menace. But as the problem became more and more severe, we realized that something drastic would be necessary. You see, till recently, our work has been with people who had lots of unhappy time on their hands between pleasurable 'dates', so they could be talked to and reasoned with. But these new Frequent Flyers could escape into their computer-amplified fantasies at the first onset of discomfort. We had no openings to reach these folks, until,"

Suddenly the lights go out and a swirling globe of light moves into the center of the circle. Slowly the dancing patterns begin to give way to an incredibly life-like scene at a nearby park. As the audience stares, they see a young man

sit down on a bench and put his hand in to his coat pocket. A close-up of his face reveals an expression that is all too familiar to these FAA'ers.

Then into the picture strolls a figure wearing a silvery, shimmering headpiece. It stands quietly in front of the Menschie. After a moment the holo-sphere becomes transparent, then is filled with a perfectly realistic, holographic picture which makes passers-by stare in disbelief. This living scene is being electronically tapped, for all to witness, from the intra-personal MiniMensch affair taking place within the seated man. Seeing that his private world has been exposed, he jumps up and walks briskly away. The globed witness pursues, a new-age mime reflecting with excruciating accuracy the self-absorbed drama of the fleeing man.

The lights come on again, and a nervous rustling is heard throughout the room. Dinnie removes the holo-sphere from her shoulders, and it takes a few moments for each one's personal memories with this terrible confrontational device to subside. They remember that the holo-sphere has another name – The Mini-Mangler -and they know that to see one's self projected in it is an experience that changes lives.

Part Three ***The Meta-Mirror Outshines MetaMensch***

Spring has once more redeemed the countryside. As they explore the blossoming meadow on this exquisite day in 2056, Cindy and Sid are filled with the joy of Nature's beauty. After awhile, Cindy becomes reflective and muses. "It's been quite awhile since I thought of Robert, my MetaMensch lover." She gives Sid's hand a tender squeeze and gently runs her fingers over the irregular calluses there.

"Robert's hands were so smooth, were so exactly how

I thought I wanted my lover to be. But when he touched me during our ‘perfect’ dates, I could feel only gratification, never the mystery and life-full vulnerability I feel with you.”

The heat of midday creates rivulets of sweat which runs across Cindy’s sun-freckled face. Sid lovingly catches a drop with his finger and grins. “My perfect Martha would never sweat!” he chuckles. Then a solemnness envelopes him and he says, “But Martha could never be other than me. And it was so lonely being trapped in my fantasy creation, even if it was exactly what I thought I wanted. Sort of like always cooking for myself. Boring!”

From nearby, laughing voices enter their communion, and soon friends from the FAA surround them and begin unpacking picnic lunches. There is an easy camaraderie among these “survivors,” who are all in painful recovery from fantasy addiction. Each is still haunted by the memory of their MetaMensch perfect lover, and each has chosen to move on into an evolving intimacy with a real, separate human being.

Suddenly Mark and Dinnie are seen running ecstatically across the meadow toward them. Dinnie is breathlessly shouting, “We got it! We got it!” Before any more words can be said, Mark tosses Cindy the envelope which is the source of their excitement.

“You got the grant!” exclaims Cindy, now as excited as they are. A round of applause spontaneously comes from the group. As soon as Dinnie catches her breath, she continues.

“Dear friends, you each know how hard Mark and I have been working this last year to develop the Holographic Projection Sphere as a tool for confronting Mini-Mensch addicts with their inner fantasy addictions. All of you have experienced seeing your private fantasies being painfully exposed through this device. And of course, when it’s used in this painfully confrontational way, it generally gets nicknamed ‘The Mini-Mangler.’

“Well, about six months ago, we began to wonder if this holo-sphere might not have still another use in the fantasy addiction recovery process. So we experimented with hooking up a Mini-Mensch computer with a holo-sphere and made a wonderful discovery! With a little practice, we became able to show each other inner images and feeling-forms that we previously had been unable to share with anyone. First, I wanted to try and show Mark the beauty of my growing feelings for him. The joy on his face as he watched my inner world come to visual reality in the holo-sphere gave me all the encouragement I needed! We were so delighted with our new creation that we named it the MetaMirror.”

“But that was only part of the work,” continued Mark. “The next step was for me to find the courage to show Dinnie some of my scarier parts, those images and feelings which I had never dared allow anyone to know were there. But I knew that denying these parts of me to Dinnie would limit our growing closeness, so we began to experiment.”

“I was so frightened at first,” added Dinnie. “All I wanted to do was flee and return to my MetaMensch lover – he was so perfect that he would never scare me with such revelations! But then I remembered also that he could never surprise me with real love. “

“So,” finished Mark, “using this revelation device which once brought only terror to fantasy addicts, we have been treating each other to visions and guided tours of our inner selves. And once we got used to doing this using the holo-sphere, it became easier to use more direct ways of sharing like touch, look, and sound. As I am really getting to know who Dinnie is, I feel much less afraid of being close with her. And now with this grant, we’ll be able to continue our research and share this new process with people everywhere!”

Everyone smiles and shares their joy, for it is so

obvious that these two have indeed found something wonderful. In the peaceful moments that follow, time seems to stand still as the perfume of springtime's new life carries these friends deep into the glory of nature's creation. It has been a long and often difficult road, they remember. And the vulnerability that each of them has been learning to feel and accept is a constant reminder that this "reality" is very different from the computer-generated "perfection" which once had meant everything to them.

Today, though, the wonder of being fully alive reigns supreme! In each heart lives a commitment to continue this quest, this opening to greater truth and genuine love. And with the radiance of their inner joy there shines also a sweet willingness to continue sharing their discoveries with other struggling souls who yearn for true Freedom and Love

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Afterthought and Invitation:

In 2018, on re-reading this story and the one that follows, almost 30 years after they were first written down, they appear to me to be more of sketches than fully developed stories. This one especially seems to want cleaning-up, filling-out, and harmonizing with the technological advances and culture of recent decades.

If you (or someone you know) feel moved to do this, I would be blessed, honored, and delighted to see one or both modified, expanded, made your own, and published in your own name.

(This story also deals with technology and relationship, but with a strong personal-development focus.)

Standing T.A.L.L.

It is a glorious morning in Boston, this 21st day of February, 2035. Tom shakes the sleep from his eyes, weaves his way to the bathroom, and is startled by his own reflection in the mirror.

“What’s different?” he wonders. But there’s still too much grogginess from the night’s restlessness. Night after night he dreams of her, yet each morning he awakes alone, confused, feeling lost and empty. As he stares vacantly at the unresponsive face in the mirror, a small patch of his mental fog begins to lift, and he knows that today is the day he will do something to change this cycle of frustration and loneliness.

He remembers the card on his dresser and goes over to read it for the hundredth time:

“OK,” he decides, “today’s the day I call!”

“Welcome, Tom,” says the pleasant woman behind the desk. “I’m Francine. I’ll bet you have a lot of questions to ask, so why don’t you just fire away, okay?”

Tom grins and nods his head in agreement. “For starters,” he winks, “what’s with your funny name? Looks like something out of a spy movie.”

“Well, you’re close,” smiles Francine. T. A. L. L. refers to our unique focus here - it means Truth Always Leads to Love. Most other services just try to match up similar personalities. After the two people get to know each other, though, the deeper inner differences begin to show up and the relationship flounders. But at *Standing T.A.L.L.*, the first part of the introduction service is to introduce you to

yourself.”

“Wait a minute!” says Tom standing indignantly. “I’ve been living with me for 37 years now – I think I know myself pretty well.”

As he sits down with a confident grin, Francine, the desk, and the entire back of the office begin to shimmer. They become blurry and then fade away, revealing a lush summer meadow with two men strolling side by side. Dumbfounded, Tom can do nothing but stare and listen. The man on the left begins to speak:

“What’s wrong, Fred – you look so miserable. Does it have anything to do with that new woman you met last night?”

“Of course,” says Fred. “You know how I’ve been looking all these years for my Perfect Woman. Well, I’ve finally found Her.”

“Wow! That’s great. But why so sad?”

“Well,” says Fred with a look of utter dejection, “she wasn’t interested in me. You see, she was looking for her Perfect Man.”

Slowly this scene also begins to shimmer, to fade, and in its place Francine, the desk, and the office reappear. She is smiling gently and seems content to allow Tom a few moments to absorb what has just happened.

“You see,” she says softly, “reality is not always what we think it is. You assumed, for instance, that when you came in here you were talking with an actual person. In truth, I am sitting in an office some 834 miles from where you are. Before you is an extremely high quality holographic receiving system. The scene you just witnessed was a holo-video of Fred in a meadow. Do you begin to understand now?”

Tom slowly recovers from the shock and finally is able to speak. “And what I saw there in the holo-video, that

somehow is a message for me, right?"

"Um-hum. You see, most of us get rather lost in the outer search for our perfect mate, always seeking that special someone who will make our life complete. Our service, though, is here for those who are wise enough to realize that the first step to fulfilling the heart's longing is always with the self. As you come to know more deeply just who you *really* are, you will become more ready to be with that special woman you are seeking.

"Therefore, before we move into the introduction phase of our service, there is extensive training in learning the deeper truths about yourself. This means seeing and understanding the illusions in your own life, just as you have seen and understood the illusions of the past few minutes here.

And remember – as you are developing your foundations in truth, so too is the woman you will eventually meet. When you are both ready, the introduction will be made. And then, as our name asserts, you will find what you seek, for **Truth Always Leads to Love**.

It is three o'clock in the morning and Tom awakes with a start. This is the third night in a row she has returned to his dreams, this woman who is a stranger, yet so very familiar. And always the same ending – a fight!

Last week when he left *Standing T.A.L.L.*, he had sworn he would never get involved with their silly program. Sure, the holo-presentation had been very impressive, but when it got down to details, they wanted him to do things that went too far! This personal introspection, meditation, and body work stuff might be okay for an aspiring holy man, but not ol' Tom.

"Never!" he had vowed, and that was that!

But then the dreams began again. She had arrived so gently, so beautiful in her dream body. She patiently explained how much she yearned to be with him, to finally

have the relationship her heart had been longing for. She had taken him, in their shared dream, to the Standing T.A.L.L. office near her home in San Diego where she had been pursuing her inner development program. He had seen that there was nothing to be afraid of, but still he had refused.

Why, she had pleaded, why wouldn't he join the program so that they could meet in person? She was drawing closer to her day of readiness, but it would all be for nothing if he were not prepared also. Her eyes beseeched him.

“Beloved! For me, for your true self, for the love that lies locked deep in your heart, please let go of this resistance and take your next step into truthfulness.”

“No! No! NO!” he is screaming as she fades. And he awakes alone, frightened and miserable.

But tonight his fighting mood is shaky, for she has just shown him, so very tenderly, the incredible beauty in the depths of her heart. And he truly has begun to cherish these dream visits with her – with this unknown yet deeply familiar woman. Could what she requests really be right, he wonders? Is it worth *Standing T.A.L.L.* to find out?

Part Two: Deborah's Song

There is a gray drizzle everywhere as Deborah stares out the window. It is March 15, 2035. The Ides of March. Not a good omen, she thinks. This is the third morning in a row she has awakened sobbing, her dreams of marital bliss dashed on the rocks of her lover's stubbornness.

“Why won't he believe me!” she cries to the window, but the swirling fog ignores her, and she remains alone. Alone, as she has been for 34 years. Alone, despite the Vision of her mate. And infinitely more lonely because of

its unfulfilled promise.

“Could I be the one who’s crazy?” she begins to wonder. “Is it really worth all this pain?” As she settles into her morning’s meditation, she is acutely aware of the events which have brought her to this seeming impasse.

It was almost one year ago, she remembers, when she walked into the San Diego office of *Standing T.A.L.L.* She had known immediately that this was the program for her – even the acronym in their name seemed perfect: Standing T.A.L.L., *Truth Always Leads to Love* This was a principle she was willing to work for, and so she had begun the training program with high hopes. When she was ready, they had promised, she would be introduced to the man who would fulfill her heart’s desire.

Her mind drifts back to the months that followed the beginning of her self-awareness training. So many different approaches, yet they had all led her into a deeper knowledge of who she really was inside. Through meditation she learned to see the confusion-producing qualities of her mind, and slowly she had developed a measure of control over them. In yoga she had found a way of opening her body to its natural ease-of-motion, and also to a peace in relaxed meditation that she had never imagined possible. During the massage sessions she had experienced the relationship between her mental habits of worry and control, and the chronic tension patterns that limited her body’s freedom and joy. As her body had become more open and relaxed, her mental patterns had softened also, and she found it much easier to be more peaceful and loving in all her relationships.

“That was a wonderful time,” she sighs, as she adjusts her wrap and begins once more to concentrate on her meditation breathing. But her mind won’t steady just yet, and she drifts back to a month ago when the Manifestation Training had begun. The teacher’s name was Helga, and her concluding words were etched indelibly upon Deborah’s

mind: “*Whatever else happens, Remember Your Vision. Stay focused on your Heart’s deepest yearning, and miracles will happen!*”

Deborah’s yearning had been intense for her mate, and in the weeks that followed, she had studied various methods of attracting him. She hadn’t actually chosen a specific course of action when, on their own, the dreams began. One man, night after night.

It wasn’t that he was so attractive, really, but they felt so right together, so much like they were destined for each other. Unfortunately, though, he hadn’t yet begun his inner truth-seeking process. *Standing T.A.L.L.* had an office near where he lived in Boston, she discovered, but he had only gone there once. Something about the inner discovery work had triggered his resistance, and try though she would, she couldn’t interest him in *Standing T.A.L.L.*

Finally, after three stormy dream meetings, in one incredible explosion of will, she had completely opened her heart to him. Now, she felt, he would certainly take the next step.

But then came the empty nights. The void where her dream-lover had once appeared to her. What happened? Why could she now feel nothing where once they had dream-danced? Had he truly abandoned their quest to find each other?

Deborah feels a shiver shoot up her spine, and there are tears welling in her eyes. The feelings of despair are almost intolerable. But she has mastered her recent lessons well, and slowly she is able to return to the peaceful inner world she now claims as her own.

As the days turn into weeks, her inner peace remains strong, even though her yearning for him is a constant companion. Her new understanding of love, however, honors his freedom, and she is careful to never again let her longing enter his dreams.

She waits. And her inner beauty continues to flower.

On the other side of the continent, meanwhile, Tom is nearly at his wits end. It's been three weeks since their last dream-meeting, and he misses her terribly. But his stubbornness is like a rock in his gut, and somehow he just can't do what she has asked.

There is, though, one *Standing T.A.L.L.* activity that he has adopted on his own – massage. And tonight he has just returned home from a particularly relaxing session. He is sitting in the quiet living room, for once feeling neither active nor drowsy. Just there. In the stillness, he can feel something settling in his stomach. The knot of resistance slowly seems to be unraveling of its own accord. He is delighted with the deep sense of peace that follows.

Spontaneously, he finds his heart reaching out to her. And it is not surrender he sees himself offering, but an acceptance of their connection. Though she does not come to him as she had in their dreams, he feels her near, feels her acceptance of him. And he knows what he must do.

“No, my beloved,” he whispers softly, “I have not abandoned our quest. It just took me awhile to understand. I will come to you now just as soon as I can. I *will* follow the path of *Standing T.A.L.L.*.”

In another city, another breath whispers softly, “Thank you, my beloved. Thank you.”

(In the early 1990s I was reading books about Organizational Transformation and fantasized writing in the field. This story grew from a mixing of that interest with my background in yoga and meditation.)

Hardcore Sees the Light

“Dammit, Tom, just drop it!” I shout, looking him straight in the eye. “I swear, you’ve got enough negativity to bum out this entire office.”

“I’m not negative,” replies Tom – alias Hardcore, the office grouch, “I’m being realistic. All this new age rhetoric you guys spew around here sounds very nice, but it just won’t work. Get real!”

I feel my stomach begin to knot like it does every time Tom and I go at it. This time, though, I remember the lessons in deep breathing from yoga class and manage to stay centered. Having heard our teacher repeat at least a thousand times, *deep yogic breathing*, it’s become almost a mantra with a life of its own. As it dances through my consciousness, my body automatically softens, just as it has so many times while opening into the yoga postures.

“Tom,” I begin hesitantly, “I’m being as real as I know how to be. This constant complaining and blaming just doesn’t go anywhere. We’ve been working here together for three years now – how many changes has your badmouthing brought about, huh?”

“Well, at least I’m being realistic, man! I get so sick of you guys spouting oft about light and love and then just sitting on your duffs when they jerk us around here.”

I knew that Tom’s words were not true, but still, I could feel myself beginning to lose it. All my muscles seemed to tighten as the anger-induced adrenalin coursed through my body. There was a part of me that wanted to

bash him good, shake him violently and make him see beyond his myopic little prejudices. But no, that kind of indulgence had become subordinate to a higher vision, to a commitment to make this office a more life-full, more harmonious place to be.

This commitment was new, though, and a bit shaky. In recent years here, most of us had been like Hardcore: miserable, negative, and feeling totally powerless to change the abusive ways we were being treated. Headaches and chronic tension were our daily companions, and survival often seemed the most we could hope for.

Then one night a bunch of us were fooling around after work and got to talking about our situation. Karen had just returned from a personal empowerment workshop, and she was bubbling over with what she had learned. Lots of the participants, she said, were in similar situations in their workplace. Much of the weekend had involved brainstorming ideas for regaining some sense of control in this vital part of their lives. As she spoke, you could tell she had captured everyone's attention. One thought danced in five minds: could these ideas be put into practice in our office?

Before the evening was over, we had agreed to begin meeting weekly in a support group focusing on personal empowerment in our workplace. When a few others heard of what we were doing, they chose to join in also. But ol' Hardcore Tom would have nothing to do with it. For him, it was "them" who were responsible for all our problems, and he seemed irrevocably glued to the idea that we were just innocent victims.

In the beginning it was mostly letting off steam, and Hardcore, had he chosen to join us, would have felt right at home. But after a few weeks of going nowhere, we began to "bring the war back home," began to talk about what was really important to each of us independent of whatever "they" might be doing. As it turned out, we each had a Vision for our life, a yearning to live in love and peace,

independent of what outer circumstances might bring.

As our group developed – and after much heated discussion – we came to more or less accept the fundamental idea that we are responsible for creating our own reality. To date, though, none of us had really put this belief to the test. In fact, what with the stress and increasingly intolerable conditions in our office, many had already been mailing out resumes. The job market offered little encouragement, however, and that as much as anything else had driven us to see if together we could make our current situation a bit more bearable. From various readings, workshops, seminars, and personal experiences, we each believed this was possible. Translating that belief into eight hours of centeredness at the office, though, was another thing altogether!

So our Tuesday evening group had become a place to support our commitment to “walk our talk.” One by one we would share our inner struggles, expose before witnesses our seemingly insoluble office dilemmas, and then begin to explore possible ways of dealing with our situations which would keep our personal integrity intact. If we couldn’t change “them,” we figured, we could at least change how we dealt with what was coming down, and especially, how we dealt with each other.

The sessions would always end with an opportunity for each of us to state before the group our intentions concerning specific situations which we expected would arise in the coming week. We could ask for help in the group, for a reminder and hug at lunch during the week, or for prayers. Just knowing, though, that it mattered to several others that I act according to my highest Vision, knowing that they would ask me next week how it had gone – this alone often gave me the necessary boost to go beyond old habit and creatively find more loving and more life-affirming ways of dealing with my problems.

Hardcore, however, was having nothing to do with

our group. In fact, he actually appeared to feel threatened by our deepening commitment to finding positive solutions at work. It almost seemed as if he were more interested in justifying his negativity than in changing the attitudes which supported it. I had vowed over and over again not to argue with Tom, but my, was he ever skilled at pushing my buttons! Last week in our group I had committed to seeing if I could talk with Tom away from the office, to really try to somehow get beyond the friction of our current situation.

So here's your chance, I think, as every fiber of my being strains to override my anger. Somehow I ignore his accusation and manage to steer the conversation toward the possibility of us two having dinner later in the week. Hardcore agrees, though perhaps for reasons best known to him.

It's now Thursday evening. Hardcore is sitting across from me at a small restaurant near the office, and we've been chit-chatting for awhile, ordering food, and generally sniffin' each other out. Tom thinks I'm going to lay some heavy rap on him about our group, but I'm careful to avoid that and keep the conversation personal. I ask him all sorts of questions about his family, his activities outside the office, and his background, just as if we were actually friends. As he talks, I begin to warm up to this guy. His "hardcore" exterior comes into perspective, and I can see a bit of the vulnerable person underneath. I avoid getting into my new age thinking, and I feel genuine interest as I encourage him to discuss his deeper feelings and thoughts.

As I had suspected, Tom too was dealing with some pretty intense issues around authority, his desire to rebel, and his fear of losing his job and not being able to provide for his family. I listened – really listened – as he slowly opened up. And as he saw that I was really interested, he allowed more of his inner pain to surface. This was hardly the Hardcore I had been working with just three hours earlier!

Then it happened. Without my saying a word, Tom looks at me and says, “Ok, enough. Now I want to hear about this support group of yours and the stuff you mentioned about people creating their own reality. I know I bug you at the office and say you’re just avoiding the real issues, but still, I’ve wondered

“Thank You Lord!” I whisper as I smile at Tom. The words flow easily now, and I just share from my heart, trying valiantly to avoid sounding dogmatic or self-righteous. Our talk about the group naturally flows into a discussion of our personal values and life goals. After giving a lengthy exposition on the purpose and meaning of life, Tom pauses and asks me my opinion.

“Well,” I say, using my best down-home drawl, “the way I figure it, I’m here to learn about breathin’.”

Tom blinks, looks puzzled, and waits.

“Breathing, you know, air in, air out.... There’s obviously a limit as to how much teasing Tom is going to endure here, so I explain. I tell him about the yoga class, about how deep breathing relaxes the muscles, clears the mind, and opens the consciousness. I take it slow, give him lots of opportunities to ask questions, and even lead him in a few minutes of breath-focused relaxation exercises right there at the table. He is remarkably receptive and smiles when it’s over. Then I jump to the next level.

“Hey Tom; you know where the word conspire comes from? I looked it up one day – it means people breathing together. So, it seems a real conspiracy is a bunch of us breathing together so deep, so powerfully, that we get linked up somehow. And then some changes get made! Conspiracies don’t have to be private affairs – this one our group is working on is open to anyone.

“Just holding our breaths half the time, though, locked up in fear and despair – that sure isn’t doing any good. I want something better. And the more I can touch that power in my gut, that ability to breath deep, feel what’s

around me clearly, and answer it with at least some tiny bit of love, well then, the more I feel like the kind of man I think I was meant to be.”

Tom listens thoughtfully, and then there’s some silence as he ponders my words. At last he looks up, smiles, and says, “I guess I kinda knew that inside me too, only I’ve been afraid to admit it. When I really feel the truth in what you say – in what I feel in here – then it changes everything. And that scares me.”

“Yeah, me too, Tom. Me too. But what’s the choice? Stay locked up, afraid, with a life of half-breaths? Or find the courage to own that inner voice, follow it, and learn to breathe a little deeper along with some sisters and brothers who are ‘conspiring’ to follow their hearts also?”

“Well now,” grins Tom, “when you put it that way, the choice seems pretty easy!”

“Tom,” I wink, “I don’t know about easy, but it sure is a lot more fun.”

(This allegory of the spiritual quest uses the image of a food-feast to reflect upon the meaning of our multiple journeys through lives and our distractions from the purpose of these lifetimes.)

The Feast

And then, oh so slowly, the absolute darkness began to recede. He couldn't see *anything* at first. It was all mist, gently swirling – and that only gradually becoming discernible in the nothingness. He tried to recall where, . . . ? Who, . . . ? But to no avail. So he watched. Soon there were vague hints of pale color, moving closer, then receding. Forms hinted at themselves, then dissolved again into the mist. Time did not seem to exist.

Gradually, he began to remember. The awareness built *so* slowly, though. But it didn't matter. So, once more I have come to the banquet table, he thought. Once more, it seems, I shall be able to decide. Oh yes, . . . I do remember this time!

All was very gay and sparkling around him now – all traces of the vagueness and mists had long since vanished. And here they were, dozens of them, all approaching a huge and incredibly magnificent banquet table. There was much frolicking and laughter all around him, but for once, the boy was strangely serene and quiet.

Then the Fruits came – tray after tray of the most fragrant, most appealing, most wonderful fruit he had ever seen! Much more tempting than last time, he thought, though that scarcely seemed possible. All his companions rushed toward the table and joyously began to feast on first one, then another of these incredible foods.

The boy stayed back and serenely looked at his companions. He knew these other people – in some

mysterious way each was intimate and dear to him. Yet each was a stranger also, as he had no recollection of their names or past. Where had they just arrived from? He did not know, but at this moment, it didn't seem very important.

The boy waited. Near, yet not too close to the banquet table. He ate nothing and said nothing, even though in time all the others came over and urged that he too make merry and enjoy the feast.

For the time being, however, the boy was content simply to observe. And remember. He watched, . . . he listened, . . . but outwardly, he said and did nothing.

Inwardly, though, he remembered. The Fruit! The incredibly wonderful Fruit. One bite and the desire to *experience* flowed like a river through the mind. Consuming more left the mind a churning sea of craving to feel, to see, to hear, to touch, to feel, . . . to *do!* All things seemed possible while the juices of these fruits flowed in one's veins. The desire to *experience* was irresistible! And there was energy too — the energy of a million suns, incessantly demanding to be expressed. It churned the mind, drove it to dive again and again into itself, into an ocean of compulsion to *create*, to *do!* No real rest was possible, no recovery between dives. This energy must be used, must be spend, must, must,

For a rare few, this throbbing energy was a wind upon which they set their sails and moved onward toward their goal, their heart's deepest yearning. For these advanced souls, the juice of the fruits did not compel, it enabled. For they had mastered the art of sailing across this ocean of *experience* safely, without capsizing, without drowning.

But alas, very few feasters were so constituted. Since most couldn't burn the energy nearly fast enough, it became a weight onto them. Yet even so, they could not stop eating! And so they each grew heavier, more dense. Finally, one by one they became too solid to remain in the heavenly realm of this exalted Feast.

As this happened, they simply slipped through the cloud-like floor of the banquet hall and descended lower, . . . and lower, . . . and lower. Then the Fruits would be out of reach, but it would take another lifetime of *experience* – of *doing* – for the compelling juices in their veins to be spent. Only afterwards was there then a possibility of real rest, of Peace.

Each time before when he had approached the banquet table, the boy had forgotten. Or rather, he had wanted to forget. For the sight of the Fruit awakened in him a deep longing and intense hunger that distorted all memory in its mad lust for fulfillment.

The first few times he had eaten his fill . . . and *experienced* much! Then, as he grew wiser, he gained the strength to remember the ravages of over-indulgence. So he would vow: just one bite this time. Just one little bite to calm the hunger.

But he soon discovered how impossible that was. For with even the tiniest amount of the Fruit in his mouth, he became uncontrollably greedy for more. And so he ate and ate until it was done. Then would come the denseness, the slipping back down into the realm of matter, and more *experiences*. Then the nothingness, the endless swirling fog. Eventually, the circle would come full and once more he would find himself before this wonderful table.

So today, he just waited. And he remembered. The tauntings of the others made no impression on him this time, though the pangs of longing for the Fruit caused him great anguish. But he had learned well, and for the time being, he did nothing.

At long last the feast was over. All the participants, save one, had become heavy and, compelled by their uncontrolled energy, had succumbed to their self-inflicted destiny.

Only the boy remained. Quietly, he walked around

the table, seeing the scattered remains of the Feast. He too, had been so hungry! And though the hunger had not left him, still, the tempting Fruit did not compel him this time.

After walking peacefully for a long time, his eyes fell upon a tiny golden tray in the middle of the banquet table. Though all about it were remains from the previous extravaganza, this one small tray showed no signs of having been seen or touched. In its very center was the smallest dish imaginable, made of pure gold and containing one barely visible seed.

Immediately the boy knew that this was what he had been waiting for. Gently, humbly, he picked up the tiny dish and slid the seed onto the center of his tongue. His mouth slowly closed over the seed, and his very soul pulled it inward.

The banquet hall fades. Memory fades. Hunger disappears. A warm glow expands outward from his body which now has become pure light. Nothing remains. No thought. No desire. But the love – oh my - it grows so large! It flows into every awareness, every particle of existence. Growing outward, growing inward, growing, growing, Growing until it is one with All. At long last he has found the way Home. All mysteries are solved. Understanding is complete. And it was always so simple! There had never been any need for all those endless dives into the ocean of *experience!* Peace and Joy had been His since the beginning, always available whenever he could become greater than his hunger. Whenever He could *remember!*

Smiling, He realizes that the cycle of feast and famine is now complete. His hunger – and the never ending compulsion to *do* – is finished. He smiles upon Himself and is pleased. It is done.

(This story uses the classic metaphor of the caterpillar's transformation into a butterfly to inspire our spiritual transformation and encourage us to consider the evolution from our animal-nature selves to the Freedom of the Divine which is our True Self.)

Black Dance Egg

It is very quiet now. Only the minute sounds of molecules rearranging themselves within my changing body. I question my sanity sometimes, alone in here. But IT is happening through me and I have no choice, really, but to allow and wait.

My black dance has been going on for so long now that it's hard to imagine life without it. So many years ago, the tiny egg was black, and its dance has moved through me unceasingly. And now these changes. What is happening to the me I used to know?

A man staggers along a deserted byway, his addiction completely controlling each motion. Thoughts that once danced to the joy of life's sweetness are now narrowed to encompass only the object of his craving. So small he has become, the black dance of the egg obliterating any other possibility of life. Compelled by the irresistible music in his soul, he staggers on, his deep humanity waiting unrealized. The worm with a thousand legs has consumed all consciousness, and his gnawing hunger beats the cadence of his life. There is no vision, only the incessant black dance within.

When I was young, the sun shone oh so brightly, and the green leaves were everywhere. From the black egg I emerged to ecstasy, a caterpillar feasting upon infinite spring sweetness.

But it didn't last for long. The swarms of hungry birds arrived, and fear became my constant companion. My skin had become fuzzy brown, but within, my heart beat only to the unending demands of the black dance – eat, grow, eat, grow, EAT! I survived, I grew, I hid, and somehow I spun this chamber in which now I lie.

The never-ending beat of the black dance was intolerable. But it was mine. I was alive within that terror – I existed! Now, though, I can't be sure. Everywhere there is the numbing silence, save only the minute echoes of molecules rearranging themselves within my soul.

The man is dizzy now – quite sober but terribly unstable. The incessant craving has mostly passed, but without it, he wonders who he might be. He has become a human, and the love lying dormant within his heart stirs, begins to call life's flow to itself. He seeks to open in relationship, yet the gnawings from his past haunt him. Even as he yearns to draw her close, the black dance sends its pulsating tendrils through his soul, and he crawls away to gnaw alone.

In the stillness of night the man dreams and sees himself in a shimmering cocoon spun from the essence of his being. He feels suffocated, and the silence within is terrifying. He can hear nothing, save the minute sounds of molecules rearranging themselves within his soul. He awakes sweating, and yearns for the green leaves of an early spring.

I have been spun tight in here for so long now I have no idea who I might be. I cannot remember when last I moved. I do not know if the green leaves still remain, and they hold no appeal for me now anyway. Where is my appetite? Is there nothing toward which I would crawl? And, . . . and, . . . wait a minute – I? . . . crawl? That's not who I am anymore.

I, . . . I, . . . I FLY!

In an ecstasy of motion, the man is gliding over the trees, feeling his newly freed wings as they soak in the sun's life-full gift. Color is everywhere, and his soul now propels him past the leaves onto the delicate yellow flowers beyond. He remembers gnawing, but instead finds new, gentle parts of himself reaching out to sip the sweet flower's nectar. Without being told, he understands that this new dance which nurtures him also sustains creation's beauty. The terrible black dance has been transformed, and the contracted mass of color which once seemed dark has now opened into these wonderful rainbow-wings on which he flies.

The man is dreaming, of course, for he knows that freedom and beauty such as this were never meant for him. Yet as he struggles to awaken, he notices . . .

It's gone! The incessant black dance no longer haunts him. The hard pulse which has been his identity since childhood has unfolded into a soft, sweet rhythm of life – his life! Is he a man dreaming he is a butterfly? Or – could it be – is he? . . .

Am I? . . . truly This?

The Black Dance Egg, the Rainbow wing

These both exist, His life to sing.

Which shall I bring?

Which shall I bring?

About the one who wrote down the stories

A brief biography-as-a-story

(Written while living in India, 2011)

Meeting a Semi-Sadhu^{*}

When I arrived at the guesthouse in Gangotri, he was sitting in the dirt removing rocks from a flowerbed. In the following weeks, we spoke occasionally, and I learned that this retired American was now living in India, heart glowing with love for his adopted *Bharat Mata*. We adored the majestic snow mountains together, and soon I too came to see the nearby *Ganga* as a living presence, an ever-dancing spirit in the form of a Sacred River.

“Don’t you miss America and your life there?” I asked him once. “Not really,” he replied smiling, and added, “My family is all right here: Lord Shiva, Mother Durga, Lord Ganesh, Saraswati Maa, Lakshmi Devi, Sita and Ram, Lord Krishna . . . And here in the high mountain air, it feels like any moment I could look up and see Lord Shiva sitting atop a snow-peak, Mother Parvati on His thigh, smiling and beckoning me to come to Them. I’m where I belong . . . I’m home!”

I asked about his past, how he came to be here. He told of an average post WWII childhood, liking school, college, then working in business administration. He “dropped-out” in the hippie days, playing with new age consciousness, trying drugs, enjoying “free” sex, and eventually meeting his Guru of many lifetimes and remembering why he had taken this birth.

^{*}In India the term *Sadhu* in refers to someone who has given up their worldly life for service and meditation. *Gangotri* is in the Indian Himalaya.

He paused, and I felt a wave of sadness radiate from him. Eyes moist, he said, “I lived in my Guru’s American ashram for four years, thinking that I was almost enlightened. He allowed me several years of indulging this fantasy, then more intensively reflected to me my weaknesses, pride, arrogance, cruelty, and overall selfishness. I kept promising that I would do better, would change, let-go of me-centered living and become truly spiritual. His frequent Satsangs [spiritual discourses] left no doubt as to what genuine spirituality required of a sincere seeker, and I longed to be purified and live in that Unbound Consciousness told of by all the Great Ones. But instead of letting go, ego held on tighter and tighter, while spirit longed more and more to fly. This culminated in a near-psychotic breakdown and leaving the ashram.

“It took several years,” he continued, to adjust to living “in the world” once more and integrating his spiritual values with the activities of daily life. For the next two decades he tried various livelihoods, social services, and relationships, continuing morning sitting practice and yoga as a bare-bones link with his spiritual goal. Life was good, it seemed, yet depressions were frequent, and he could not overcome the feeling of distance he had created with his Guru.

When he began to despair of ever getting out of this comfortable, mostly pleasant life, his 81 year old mother became ill and was clearly nearing her end. “By God’s Grace,” he said, he was then able to terminate his life on one side of the country and move to the other to live with her and help in her final year. “So much healing then,” he sighed, finishing “old business,” enjoying each other’s company, and caring for her as she had cared for him a half-century earlier.

Then thud, . . . she was gone. The childhood house was sold, and with his inheritance he’s been living simply

ever since. The following year his Guru left His body and became even more all-pervading, available as the still-small voice within to guide, inform, and Love. Meditation practice became more and more important; worldly concerns reduced. His re-married father was still there, though, and growing weaker. Finally he too passed on, and two days later he heard an inner voice saying, “*You are moving to India.*” Never had he thought of going to India alone, yet after 30 years of drinking that culture’s wisdom traditions, he couldn’t resist. His inner Guru even specified leaving six months hence, leaving lots of time to learn and do what was needed and to prepare emotionally. Then arrival in Western-friendly Dharamsala, half a year of adjusting to living in the Himalayan foothills, and finally settling into life along the river Ganga, winters in Uttarkashi, summers in Gangotri, both places his Guru had done *sadhana* [spiritual practices] 60 years earlier.

“Practice is so much easier here, so much richer and supported by the very land and air,” he said. “And always I hear Mother Ganga nearby, singing to me as She has called to seekers since time immemorial: *Come Home, child. . . . Flow with me to the Infinite Ocean of Light!*”

“So I live as a semi-sadhu,” he concluded. “My desires are few and easily met, my days revolve around sitting practice, watching mind, prayer, Satsang, and longing to see my Guru once more and finally dissolving into His unfathomable Light and Love. When I can’t sit any longer, I come out here and work in the garden, feeling in rocks, soil, and plants similar transformations to the changes I believe He is making in this child. As the Himalayan sun and rain work their magic on my green friends, so too is His Love coaxing this soul-bud to blossom, to lose its hardness and open to the Divine Beauty waiting to unfold.”

He became quiet then, and I sensed our visit was complete. The next day urgent business called me back to

the city, and when I returned the following summer, he had moved on. Sitting in front of my room, gazing out at the laughing sea of flowers before me, I remembered our conversations, . . . and smiled.

(Though intending to spend the remainder of his life in India, a few years after this was written, his legal status as a resident there became uncertain and he moved back to the U.S. He continues his semi-Sadhu life in the woods near Boston.)